Women's Experience of Forgiveness—It's NOT a Virtue!

Lilith

the independent Jewish women's magazine

The Right Stuff?

The Surprising and Growing Market for Jewish Women's Eggs

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Lilith

Volume 26, No. 3, Fall 2001

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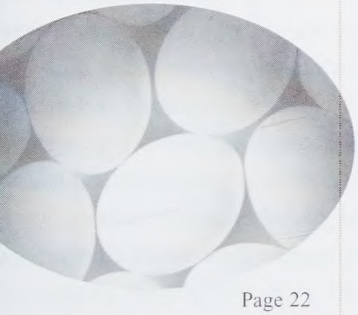

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Who was Lilith?

In the Garden of Eden, long before the eating of the apple, the Holy One created the first human beings—a man, Adam, and a woman, Lilith. Lilith said "We are equal because we are created from the same earth."

—from The Alphabet of Ben Sira, *23a-b*

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BY REBECCA METZGER

Sex in the Jewish City: LILITH takes you to the frontlines of the Jewish dating scene, telling you how to be safe, savvy and successful as a SJF.

16 Beyond Forgiveness

BY RABBI SUSAN SCHNUR

Can we free ourselves from a model meant for men? During the penitnetial High Holiday season, can we learn how to get beyond the binary, male construct of "forgiving" vs. "not forgiving"? LILITH's Editor at Large teaches us that *shleymut* (a spiritual and emotional wholeness), not simpleminded forgiveness, will emancipate us from our hurts. Plus—a new book and two remarkable films to illuminate our thinking.

22 Jewish Women's Eggs—A Hot Commodity in the IVF Marketplace

BY SUSAN WEIDMAN SCHNEIDER

Ads in college papers invite Jewish women to become egg donors—for compensation up to $50,000! Turns out that infertile Jewish women are looking for eggs from younger versions of themselves. LILITH's Editor in Chief explores the assumptions behind the ads, the risks to young women and the complex emotions generated by new reproductive possibilities. Plus ELEANOR J. BADER on buying and selling: the metaphors of assisted reproduction.

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Wrestling with the past, searching for soul, and reproducing Jews.

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COMPILED BY NAOMI DANIS

Each fall LILITH scans the horizon for books with Jewish content and a feminist perspective. This time, a hopeful crop: books that encourage young people to take risks and resist adult cynicism, and an interview about what Palestinian-Israeli children read.

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How to Find the Big Dipper and the North Star BY SANDY SUPOWIT

It's all about complexity.

In the Lilith office, in our editorial meetings, I often hear myself saying, "...and on the *fourth* hand...." I believe that one of Lilith's great strengths is the magazine's commitment *not* to simplify, but to identify—and report on—ambiguities. Our most intense interest, editorially, is sparked when a subject has many facets. Life does not always present us with clearcut choices, and it's a Lilith specialty to discern differences among shades of gray. This issue of LILITH has stories more nuanced and complicated than even our usual high standards for examining subjects from multiple perspectives.

First, the features. Susan Schnur takes us on a journey through the many possible stages of forgiveness—from women's proclivity for being too forgiving through the astringent process of a healthy and whole not-forgiving. This section parses the gender differences in apologizing, and corroborates what many of us have suspected all our lives: that generally it is much harder for men to say they're sorry. And women say it far too often.

For an analysis of being "Single and Jewish and Female in the Internet Age," Rebecca Metzger talks to dozens of Jewish women about their experiences of online dating. Along the way, she discovers some interesting ambiguities about relationships in general. Meeting a potential life partner, a process which may look simple and straightforward on your computer screen, turns out to be as much of a roller-coaster ride as blind dates ever were. And the hard work starts *after* you're face to face.

This issue was going to press just as the September 11 terror attacks struck. As we grieve, we pray for courage, strength and a world at peace.

Then there are the eggs. This is a report which has been brewing in my mind and in our office ever since a small classified ad appeared in this magazine three and a half years ago. I began to ruminate on the many parts to this story when I saw more recent advertisements soliciting eggs for infertile women and offering huge sums of money to the egg donors. Susan Kahn, whose book on reproductive issues in Israel is reviewed in this issue, first alerted me to the ads appearing in the Brandeis student newspaper, noting that "Jewish women's genetic material" is now in high demand. My first response was a kind of horrified fascination at the extraordinary compensation offered for the eggs of Jewish college students. Horror gave way to sympathy, and the fascination stayed. This story has a different angle every time I approach it. The sums are too high; some women having difficulty getting pregnant want these eggs at any cost; the drive for a biological child ups the ante; there's elitism in what prospective parents are looking for in the donors. And on and on. All parties can justify their actions, and there's little that's clearly right or wrong about the sometimes competing and sometimes complementary needs of these two generations of Jewish women.

But writing the eggs story revealed to me more than the complexities of human need and the money to help alleviate it. I also came to see (as happens from time to time) how LILITH has been both witness to and a participant in important changes, changes in the ways Jewish women see ourselves and our roles. Take a look at the timeline in the eggs story as one example. LILITH has been in the forefront of thinking (and writing) about Jewish women and reproduction since our first year of publishing, 25 years ago. This timeline maps the shifts in Jewish women's changing reproductive anxieties. Long ago (1977), feminists were angry that Jewish male leaders seem to want them to back out of graduate school and the workplace and concentrate on having children, since it looked as if there would be hardly any Jews left in the world by mid-21st Century. Today, the energy in the discussion about having babies comes not from worried men running Jewish organizations threatened by shifting demographics, but from women themselves. Women who postponed childbearing (a choice not always available, physically or psychologically, before the women's liberation movement of the early 1970s) now sometimes find themselves eager to become mothers, whether or not they have found the partner of their dreams.

Like the eggs report, all the articles in this issue—including the award-winning short story—are woven from remarkable narratives of women's complicated lives, and the ambiguities that chronically saturate our days. Nothing is simple.

Well, a few things *are* simple. One of the chronic non-ambiguities in the life of this magazine is its perpetual need for sustenance from you, LILITH's readers. This magazine, which wins kudos from readers and awards from media mavens, is still a financial high-wire act. We're able to stay up there largely through the generous contributions of people like you, who read the magazine and care about the issues we explore with you in its pages.

I think you know that nonprofit, content-rich periodicals cannot survive without financial support above and beyond the subscription price, so I ask you, please, to make a tax-deductible contribution to LILITH right now. Just as you give money to your

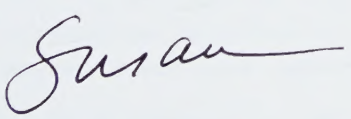
The remarkable narratives of women's complicated lives. . .

contribution to LILITH right now. Just as you give money to your synagogue, your local women's center or your alma mater, please think of a contribution to LILITH as one of your "automatic" tzedakah commitments. Listed to the right are some of the people who help LILITH flourish, providing venture capital for ideas and making possible the content you will find nowhere else. Please try to put *your* name on these pages for our next issue. By sending a contribution to LILITH now, you free LILITH editors from some of our fundraising efforts so that we can concentrate on scoping out the *next* new things in the lives of Jewish women.

I wish that there were an endowment fund or some other source of unrestricted funds we could draw on to pay the costs that subscriptions don't cover. But the truth is that even after 25 years of continuous and successful publishing, we have to raise funds from issue to issue. Please help by supporting LILITH by check or credit card. (Let's say, one dollar for every year of our life so far; or 120 dollars, if you're superstitious.) The address and toll-free number appear right below the names of our generous supporters.

When you read the article on forgiveness, I hope you'll remember that the world is not as binary as some thinkers would have us believe. You don't have to turn your life around by 180 degrees to make change. Even small adjustments can have large consequences. Betsy Platkin Teutsch, in the new Reconstructionist High Holiday prayerbook, puts it like this: "A subtle shift now, of even a fraction of a degree out of 360, can take one on a vastly different path over the course of a life's trajectory."

I wish you a worthwhile trajectory adjustment, and a year of peace.



Susan Weidman Schneider

Lilith

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kol ishah

Kol Ishah: "The Voices of Women." Traditionally, the voice of the Jewish woman was not to be heard in public, lest it arouse men. No more. These pages are for news about Jewish women, in our own strong voices.

A Blessing for Your Breasts

Linda Frichtel

Like many women, Bonnie Zaben, a 42-year-old doctoral student at the Jewish Theological Seminary, examines her breasts each month. She checks for lumps, a regular and simple screening process for early signs of breast cancer. But unlike many, she has managed to transform this anxiety-provoking routine from an unpleasant necessity into a spiritual occasion.

"For a while, I hadn't been doing regular breast exams," says Zaben, "But one time when I did check my breasts and did not find anything to worry about, my automatic response was to say, 'Thank God.' Then I thought—No, really. I *do* need to thank God that my body is healthy."

Zaben describes her breast exam rites as "rituals in progress." Each month, she recites a classic prayer, as well as some readings or poetry. One traditional prayer that immediately came to her mind was the prayer that thanks God for "fashioning human beings with wisdom, and creating within them openings upon openings, cavities upon cavities . . . if one of them were ruptured, or one of them were sealed, it would be impossible to stand before You for even one hour." Thanking God for keeping all of her parts in order felt particularly relevant to Zaben as she began to create a ritual around probing for breast lumps.

Breast checking costs no money, and the only tools we need are our own hands. Yet women *still* don't do it.

For first-timers, Zaben recommends the "*shehecheyanu*." This blessing thanks God for "keeping us alive, sustaining us, and bringing us to this time"—appropriate considering the prevalence of breast cancer and its devastating effects.

Zaben's rituals are not, she says "*Torah mi-Sinai*" (Torah as handed down from Mount Sinai). "This is a personal process—I want to encourage people to take the idea and make it work for themselves." She has heard from women who have invented rituals different from hers, such as using the circling motion of breast checking as a relaxation or meditation technique.

Developing breast checking rituals and speaking to other Jewish women about them has given Zaben an outreach mission. "It is *so* frustrating. I meet many smart women who do preventive medicine in so many ways—they take a ton of herbs and vitamins—and they don't do this! Breast checking costs no money, the only tools we need are our hands, and women *still* don't do it," she rails.

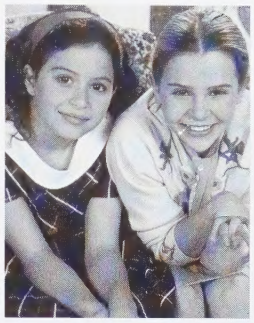
Zaben realizes that ritual is not for everyone, and insists that women who do not do ritual should still do self-exams. "But if ritual brings more women into doing it, that's great!"

—RACHEL KRANSON

If you want to contribute to this "ritual in progress," please send your ideas to Lilith Magazine, 250 West 57 Street #2432, New York, NY 10107 or email Lilithmag@aol.com

Set Your VCRs: Jewish Women and Their Hair Appearing on TV This Season

Returning to your TV screen this season are Jewish women, in series where they (and their families' values, and their own unconventional hair) are in dramatic counterpoint to the gentiles around them.



In Fox Family's charming *State of Grace* (far right), the Rayburn family moves in 1965 from Chicago to North Carolina to run a furniture factory. The European-born father, who lost his family in the Holocaust, and the American-born mother are uneasy with the local prejudiced Christians, their African-American employees, their *very* Southern Jewish neighbors, the Catholic school of their daughter Hannah, and Hannah's best friend's country-club family. All this cultural difference seems represented by Hannah's uncontrollable frizzy hair.

Both ABC's *The Practice* (with long-haired, Emmy-winning Camryn Manheim as Ellenor Frutt) and Showtime's *Queer as Folk* featured hard-driving Jewish women lawyers and single-mothers-by-choice having conflicts with their sperm donors. On *Queer As Folk,* the Jewish heritage of the brunette lesbian Melanie Marcus was belittled last season by her non-Jewish partner's gay male friends, who halted the *brit* of their son as a triumphant assertion of male homosexual rights.

Emmy-winning NBC comedy *Will and Grace* has earned kudos for its portrayal of a gay man and his best friend, a single woman with a mass of curly, auburn locks, but this show is also noteworthy because Grace Adler (top left) is different from any other Jewish women on TV. Based on a childhood friend of co-creator/executive producer Max Mutchnick, Grace is played by Debra Messing (now doing hair product endorsements), who told *USA Today* she is "a Jewish girl from Brooklyn" whose grandmother used to speak Yiddish to her.

Audiences didn't find out that Messing's Grace was Jewish too until well into the first season, with Yiddishms then put into the mouth of proper WASP Will for comic incongruity, setting off gales of studio-audience laughter.

Grace has an unusual level of Jewish identity for women on TV. Over the past three seasons we've learned that she had 10 years of "Sunday school" and a bat mitzvah, and that she once broke her Yom Kippur fast with a cheeseburger. In one episode she also shared a "Jewess" recognition moment with guest star Sandra Bernhard.

While most hit shows blanch out ethnicity for wider appeal in case they go into syndication, the character of Grace actually takes pride in what she explicitly labels a "Jewish" emotional style. In an episode last season, Grace confronted Will after a dinner, featuring an endless discussion of the weather, with Will's married dad and a flighty young woman who appeared to be his mistress:

> WILL: My family is not like your family. There's certain things that we don't talk about, so if my dad says that she's a colleague, that's what she is.
> GRACE: So, you're just gonna deny the truth to avoid suffering? That is so . . . not Jewish. . . . the level of denial—I mean, you people should be studied! . . . I am serious! I feel like a Jewish Jane Goodall, and you're "*goyim* in the mist!"

Most unusual for a Jewish woman on TV is that Grace has a sex life. After recovering from a first-season break-up, she has since slept with, at least, a Buddhist, an African-American millionaire, a non-Jewish slob and a WASP (Will's brother). While Grace says that when she has children she intends to raise them Jewish (over Will's objections, should he be the sperm donor), she has not yet breached that last taboo for Jewish women on TV: dating a Jewish man.

—NORA LEE MANDEL

So Girls Really Are Smarter Than Boys?

A study from the Institute for Jewish Policy Research in London shows that girls in Jewish schools in the UK consistently outperform boys in all subjects. Especially interesting, according to an executive of the research firm, is that in Judaic subjects–"arguably the *raison d'etre* of Jewish schools"–girls also beat out the boys. More girls than boys take the Hebrew "A-levels," state exams, so in coming years women will swell the pool of candidates for top posts in Jewish education.

Problem-Solving with *Seykhl* (Intelligence):

To encourage teenage mothers in New York to have their babies vaccinated, Weill Cornell Medical Center's Teenage Pregnancy and Parenting (TAPP) offers them gift certificates for children's clothing. The program was the baby (forgive the pun) of two Jewish women: Dr. Allison Beitel, a senior pediatric resident at Cornell, originated the idea, and refined it with Dr. Maura Frank. Over 90 percent of TAPP's clients depend on Medicaid, and 99 percent are single teens; the clothing reward may be a potent draw towards better infant health.

kol ishah

The Third Wave

Activism is alive and well at the Third Wave Foundation, a five-year-old national organization founded to empower and inform young feminist activists through grantmaking, public education campaigns and networking. "We do more than talk about world peace in an evening gown," says a recent mailing. Thirteen women, their ages ranging from 16 to 28, met recently with other grassroots organizations in the Pacific Northwest, where they discussed such issues as local hate groups and anti-gay legislation.

"We're a multi-issue organization," said Third Wave director Sally Kohn, 24. And while Third Wave is not made up only of Jewish women, said Kohn, "we bring our identities to the larger table."

Prejudice in Poland Today

When Jan T. Gross's *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton, 2001) was published in Poland last year, it created a public furor that has had profound implications.

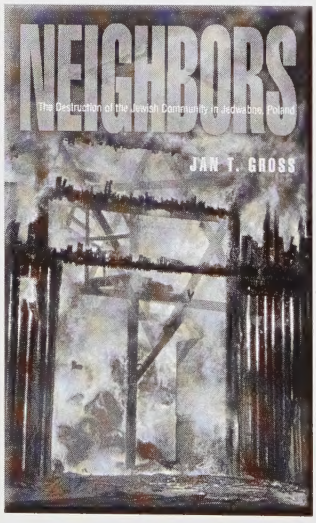
The Polish-born Jewish sociologist's book recounts how "one day, in July 1941, half of the population of a small East European town murdered the other half." In the Polish village of Jedwabne, only 118 miles northeast of Warsaw, 1,600 Jewish residents were beaten, clubbed, knived and mutiliated by their non-Jewish neighbors. At the end of the day's bloodbath, all the Jews still alive were rounded up and driven into a large barn, which was doused with kerosene and lit. They were burned to death.

The controversy in Poland centers on the questions: Did it happen? Who was responsible? Why did it happen? What was Poland's responsibility during the Holocaust? What is its meaning today? As Gross asks in his book, "How can the wiping out of one-third of its urban population be anything other than a central issue of Poland's modern history?"

In Warsaw, my Jewish and non-Jewish Polish feminist friends have been discussing the Jedwabne massacre and Gross's book. My friends, part of a new wave of "public intellectuals," have a global perspective and are familiar with American discourse on racism. Their deconstructions of traditional Polish culture include exposing the anti-Semitism embedded in Polish literature and language.

Post-communist examinations of anti-Semitism gained momentum in 1999, when intellectuals such as Maria Janion and Bozena Uminska began to examine the Polish roots of prejudice[see LILITH, Winter 2001]. Their work in some ways was a forerunner of Gross's historical investigation. Dr. Janion, a respected scholar of 19th century Romanticism, stated recently that "Poland cannot expect to join the European Union while disowning its Jews." The culture quakes when she, a prominent non-Jewish intellectual, describes how anti-Jewish attitudes are fixed in the Polish language. "It's okay—I can walk with the label 'political correctness.' I can pay any price. I will also convince people to understand how violence is hidden in the language, how it hides a cultural pattern in which hostility toward the Jews is inscribed: the Jews as strange, not to be trusted, as parasites." In *Neighbors*, Gross's call for a new historiography reinforces Janion's analysis.

Poland's romantic notion of itself is unraveling, says Maria Janion. The overthrow of communism was its last glorious stand. The nation's primary identification with Catholicism is gradually shifting to embrace broader notions of citizenship. And the problematic categories polarizing "Pole" versus "Jew" are also breaking down. Perhaps in light of the current revelations by Gross and the feminist truth-tellers, Polish society will finally come to terms with its anti-Semitism.



It seems possible. At a stirring July 10 memorial in Jedwabne commemorating the 60th anniversary of the victims' deaths, President Aleksander Kwasniecki of Poland officially apologized. However, as Helena Datner, a Warsaw Jewish community spokesperson, told LILITH: "Polish Jews must ask ourselves at the deepest spiritual level, 'How can we make peace with our enemies?'"

—SHANA PENN, Open Society Institute Fellow

A Klezmer Band That Packs a Feminist Punch.

"Women's voices have been so contained, so sidelined in traditional Jewish culture, that we wanted to get together and shout from the rooftops," says violinist Alicia Svigals, of the all-women's klezmer band Mikveh. Named in celebration of the traditional Jewish women's monthly ritual immersion, the group began in 1998, when Svigals, bassist Nicki Parrott, clarinetist Margot Leverette, Yiddishist singer Adrienne Cooper, and accordianist Lauren Brody performed together at a benefit organized by Eve Ensler, author of *The Vagina Monologues*. Their eponymous debut album Mikveh (Traditional Crossroads) opens with the beautiful "*Royz royz*," about the subject of forbidden love, and goes on to tackle issues like spousal abuse and the quiet grief of miscarriage. The CD includes a song about a daughter's bat mitzvah and a version of the traditional psalm "*Eyshes Khayil*," (A Woman of Valor), celebrating women's work.

—SHIRA KLINE

Staying Alive, Reshaping The Third World

As feminists in industrialized societies mobilize against gender inequality, Third World women struggle daily just to survive. To help in this struggle, the American Jewish World Service has launched its Women's Empowerment Fund specifically to aid these women, most of whom are not Jewish.

Statistics from the United Nations and the World Bank tell bleak stories. Of the world's 1.3 billion poor, 70 percent are women. Nearly 900 million women live on less than $1 a day. Half a million women die annually from pregnancy and childbirth. More than 100 million girls and women have undergone genital mutilation. More women die or become ill from gender-based violence than from cancer, traffic injuries and malaria combined. Of the world's HIV-positive victims, nearly half are women.

AJWS funding goes to such grassroots groups working to improve the condition of women's lives as Tostan, a women's health and education movement in Senegal, working to end female genital mutilation; Creating Hope International, based in Afghanistan, training teachers and conducting workshops on human rights; Pro Mujer, in the Peruvian Amazon, producing radio programs about women's health issues with the help of health care workers and traditional healers.

"We launched the Women's Empowerment Fund to highlight women's struggles and achievements in developing countries," said Ruth Messinger, AJWS president. "If given the opportunity to move and reshape their communities, these women can do so with passion and power."

—ALICE SPARBERG ALEXIOU

Trafficking in Women

LILITH has reported on the continuing and shameful saga of sex slavery in Israel involving foreign women. Now a new hotline has been set up for women awaiting deportation in prisons after being arrested in brothels. The Hotline for Migrant Workers provides these women with legal services, and its existence pressures the government to treat trafficked women as victims, not as criminals. The Israeli High Court of Justice has granted the Hotline the status of "Amicus Curiae" (friend of the court), the New Israel Fund reports. (In Israel call 03-560-2530.)

Great News!

LILITH magazine has been honored, for the third year in a row, with several awards from the American Jewish Press Association. These Simon Rockower prizes honored individual articles and two special sections in LILITH, one on weddings ("Isn't It Ironic? White Weddings in a Feminist Era!" Spring 2000) and one on women's extraordinary friendships ("Friendships Without Borders," Summer 2000). Ann Moliver Rubin's memoir "Let My Husband Die" and Sheva Zucker's critique of poet Kadya Molodowsky, "The Queen of Yiddish," received awards for excellence, as did our cover illustration of "Dr. Laura" by Tom Cocotos. Mazal tov to all!

kol ishah

Dirty Diamonds

Women who may be choosing diamond engagement rings, take note. Before settling on a stone, make sure that it is not a "dirty diamond," that is, one that comes from Sierra Leone, Angola, or the Democratic Republic of Congo, all countries which have used proceeds from diamond sales to wage civil war against unarmed men, women, and children.

In late June, the Reform Jewish movement voiced its support for the bipartisan "Clean Diamonds Act," introduced by Senators Dick Durbin (D-IL), Russ Feingold (D-WI), and Mike DeWine (R-OH). If passed, this law would ban the import of "dirty," or "conflict diamonds." Nations that produce diamonds lawfully would be allowed to continue their trade with the United States.

"This is an issue particularly close to home for the Jewish community," said Rabbi David Saperstein, co-director of the Commission on Social Action for Reform Judaism. "Jews, both historically and today, have been at the forefront of the diamond industry and are involved on every level from mining to retailing. Therefore, it is imperative that we also be at the forefront of putting an end to the human rights abuses caused by conflict diamonds."

Sex (Yes, "Sex," Not "Gender")

goodvibrations.com

For a while now, a diverse stream of feminists under the rubric of "sex-positive" have been working to transform our cultural understandings of sexuality, perversity, work and oppression. They've argued that taking control of one's own sexual pleasure is a vital aspect of women's personal empowerment, and that people have every right to use their own bodies in ways they freely and consensually choose. A stripper, for example, should be able to exert her power in the capitalist exchange of goods for money. Sex work, goes this new thinking about s exuality, is actual work that should be regarded as such and should be unionized. Many aspects of non-traditional sexuality (from queer sex to S/M, from non-monogamous relationships to a heterosexual how-to video called *Bend Over Boyfriend*) can liberate individuals or society as a whole.

Somehow, a disproportionate number of the leaders in this world are Jewish. Jewish women are making porn that reflects real human sexuality, working as educators, writing intelligent erotica and selling vibrators to the masses. Here's a short round-up of some of the sex world's most chosen of people: **Hanne Blank,** author of the groundbreaking *Big Big Love: A Sourcebook on Sex for People of Size and Those Who Love Them,* editor of *Zaftig: Well Rounded Erotica,* and co-editor of the Scarleteen.com, a sexuality education clearinghouse for teens and young adults. She's a self-described "great big Jew (literally as well as metaphorically)" whose "sign is egalitarian Conservative with radical Reconstructionism rising and [her] moon, as it were, is in feminist havurot and ethical study." **Joani Blank** (no relation to Hanne), the self-described Jewish Unitarian Universalist who founded Down There Press in 1975 and, two years later, opened Good Vibrations, the world's first "clean, well-lighted" sex shop. **Scarlet Harlot,** aka Carol Leigh, was a red-diaper baby in Jackson Heights, Queens, before she became head of the Prostitutes Education Network, a founding member of ACT-UP and a leader in the sex workers' rights movement. She writes: "When most middle-class women experience harassment. . .they are taught to challenge the abuses in their lives. Meanwhile, prostitutes are out there on the streets being harassed regularly by police and no one advocates to protect their bodies, let alone their sensibilities." **Annie Sprinkle,** the original slut/goddess herself, the prostitute, porn star-turned-performance artist, author, activist, and sex guru responsible for the "public cervix announcement," embraces her Jewish roots in a number of projects, including the Ellen/Annie piece in her book *Post Porn Modernist*: "The truth is, Annie Sprinkle still is very much Ellen Steinberg." **Karen X. Tulchinsky,** the self-described "nice Jewish butch," author or editor of 10 books about love, lust, and lesbian desire, including *Friday The Rabbi Wore Lace: Jewish Lesbian Erotica* and *In Her Nature,* a collection of short stories about, among other things, "grieving and thriving as a Jewish dyke." **Laura Weide,** creator of the now-somewhat-infamous "Labia Menorah"—by which you can light candles on 8 nights of vulvas—and Lesbian Porn 101, a comprehensive video history. **Dr. Ruth Westheimer**—the original. Her academic career began with a scholarship for a master's in sociology that had been earmarked for a Holocaust survivor. From there it was just a hop, skip and a jump to becoming America's most famous and respected sex therapist.

Other notable sex-positive sisters include: **Erica Jong,** original choreographer of the "Zipless Fuck" in *Fear of Flying* (1973), **Julia Query,** member of the labor organizing staff of the Lusty Lady strip club (now unionized) and director/producer of the documentary, *Live! Nude! Girls! Unite!* [LILITH; Winter 2000] and **Marcy Sheiner,** editor of *The Oy of Sex: Jewish Women Write Erotica.*

—DANYA RUTTENBERG

Under the Flowerpot Hat: Orthodox Feminists Moving Cautiously

Like porcupines making love, Orthodox feminists bringing feminism to Orthodoxy are proceeding carefully.

Some 400 women and a sprinkling of men attended the 2001: JOFA (Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance) in Progress one-day conference in New York last spring. (JOFA's major two-day conferences in 1998 and 2000 each attracted 2,000 participants.)

The JOFA icon could well be the image of conference chair Pam Scheininger, 27, who on the conference day was wearing an inverted flowerpot hat as she ran around with cell phone to ear.

"When I wear a hat, no one questions what's going on inside my head," said a rebbetzin who has been pushing for increased religious participation by women. For Orthodox feminists, the question of modesty (*tzniut*)—what's to be covered up, versus what's to be revealed—constitutes the heart of the matter. Accordingly, the hottest conference topics were off the record. One example: the session on "Abuse of Children and Teens at Orthodox Institutions: Communal Responsibility." But after the Orthodox Union's years of covering up charges of sexual abuse by Rabbi Baruch Lanner when he was a top official of the OU's youth division, one might think it time to go as public as possible on this issue.

Educator Beverly Gribetz, one of the co-chairs of another off-the-record session, "The Glass Ceiling: Women's Torah Learning and Leadership," in the end spoke openly about her frustrations.

"In the last five years there have been at least nine searches for heads of co-ed Orthodox high schools, that is, schools that are proud of the fact that they give an equal education to women. Not one of those schools has even interviewed a woman," said Gribetz, former headmistress of New York City's distinguished Ramaz School. Many of these schools claim they must be headed by a rabbi, thereby automatically eliminating women. To which Gribetz says: "The first point is that you do not need to be a rabbi to have the qualities necessary to run a school. The second is that if rabbi is a requisite and there is a non-rabbi man who wants such a job, he can get *smikha* (ordination) to meet the requisite, while there is no way a woman can."

Orthodox women are also at a disadvantage in the Jewish Community Center and Jewish federation world, where institutions want someone with the title of rabbi—male or female—to head religiously oriented programs. In the words of one conference participant, "'Rabbi' is shorthand for 'qualified.'" Orthodox women, no matter how well educated and talented, just don't fill the bill.

Unlike other streams of Judaism, Orthodox feminism must deal with Jewish text as something immutable. Speaking at the session "Toward an Orthodox Feminist Theology," Devorah Zlochower, director of full-time programs and Talmud instructor at New York's Drisha Institute, described herself as "stuck in the following conundrum: As a product of an Orthodox upbringing, I always wanted to teach Torah, even before feminism. The very things I value are the things that don't seem to value me. The texts themselves marginalize me."

JOFA president and founder Blu Greenberg has been carefully breaking ground as an Orthodox feminist for more than 25 years. Greenberg's agenda includes ordaining women as Orthodox rabbis, and asks, "If not, why not?" Greenberg says her Orthodox feminist stand is "particularly difficult in the face of the critique that says one is undermining the social order." But change is taking place. Her mother, Greenberg said, spent "50 years baking brownies for her husband's students. Her granddaughters are now studying and teaching Talmud in her lifetime." What next? "The incongruities," Greenberg said, "are part of the challenges of the coming years."

—AMY STONE with reporting by EDWARD J. KROWITZ

For more information on JOFA: www.jofa.org or (212) 752–7133 or (888) 550–JOFA.

kol ishah

Israeli Women Soldiers Break the "Steel Ceiling"

Kidma, a University of Haifa project for the advancement of women, ran seminars this year on "empowerment of young female army officers." Participants said that the course, offered in conjunction with the Israel Defense Forces women's corps, gave them the skills to, in their words, "break the steel ceiling." More on this theme: in June, Second Lt. Roni Zuckerman, 20, completed her training to become the first female fighter pilot in Israel. Zuckerman is the granddaughter of two Warsaw Ghetto fighters, according to the Jerusalem Post. IDF also announced in June that reserve duty for Israeli women will now extend until age 38. Previously, the cut-off age was early 30s.

For many roles, "rabbi" is still the shorthand for "qualified" in the Orthodox world, so Orthodox women, no matter how well educated and talented, just don't fill the bill.

To be **Single** and **Jewish** and **Female** in the **Internet @ge**

BY REBECCA METZGER

She has been on so many dates that she's starting to think she has exhausted all of the single Jewish men in Chicago in their 20s and early 30s. "My biggest fear is that I'm going to be set up with someone that I've already been set up with."

Indeed, Cindy Urman's concern is not entirely unfounded. The 24-year old, who works as an entertainment P.R. associate, is regularly set up on blind dates. She attends singles parties thrown by the Jewish United Fund/Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago (JUF). She has posted her profile on Jdate (*www. Jdate.com*), the largest online Jewish dating site. And she once attended a session of SpeedDating, where she rotated through seven potential dates in one evening. Even so, Urman says the pickings are slim and the proceedings sometimes grim. "Eighty-five percent of the time, the men are not what I want." So she's relaxing her criteria for a mate to include men in their mid-to late-30s.

Feminism has brought with it an unprecedented independence for women. Women marry later, move to communities away from their families, and have the ability to be economically self-sufficient. All of these factors contribute to the freedom women have to choose a mate, but may also have added to the difficulty of finding venues to meet that ideal partner.

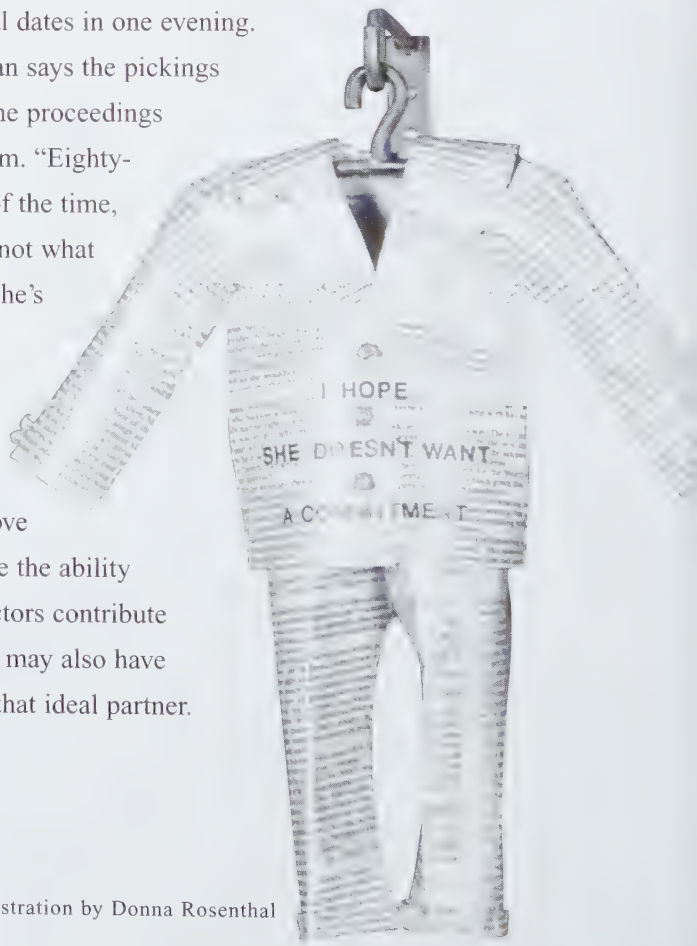


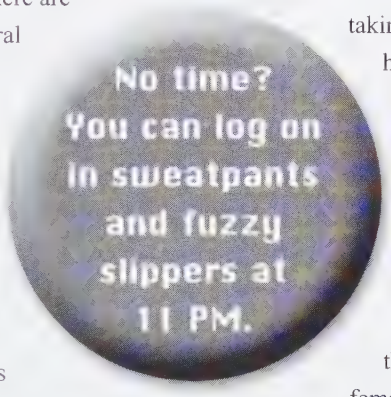
Illustration by Donna Rosenthal

Modern Matchmaking

The Jewish community certainly has not lagged in its invention of modern methods to match Jewish singles. After all, Jewish ritual stresses marriage as the central event of a Jew's life and young, single, heterosexual Jewish women are especially primed to continue the Jewish faith. The yenta may be dying out, but one need only skim Jewish papers around the nation to find the yenta's substitute: singles events with names like Matchmaking Marathon, Matzah Ball and Utopia Jewish Singles Events.

Singles events make no pretense about their purpose, nor do those who can afford to pay up to $125 to attend them. Strictly heterosexual, these events ostensibly remove the questions of whether he is single or coupled, Jewish or non-Jewish, gay or straight. Many also remove the initial awkwardness of approach. In addition to the much-hyped SpeedDating technique, Matchmaking Marathon dispatches professional matchmakers to facilitate meetings. And at Jewish singles parties, as at old-fashioned college mixers, participants often drink in order to loosen up.

For those like me, a 25-year-old New York writer, or Amy Lewis, a 32-year-old elementary school teacher, who say we would never set foot in an event labeled "singles," there are activities planned by Jewish community and cultural centers, synagogues, and "young leaders" divisions of Jewish philanthropies and arts organizations. While not explicitly targeted to them, such activities are often swarming with young, single Jews. In fact, I have a confession to make. I met my boyfriend at a Jewish Community Center literary reading. And Amy Lewis met her husband at a Sukkot hike sponsored by Manhattan's B'nai Jeshurun synagogue. While neither of us was particularly looking at the time, we both struck up interesting conversations with single Jewish men with whom we exchanged phone numbers at the end of the event.



From Fear to Boldness

There's a perception among some young Jews that limiting one's dating to the Jewish community makes things safer and easier. Maybe that's why 200 attractive young men and women turned up last spring for one of Utopia Events' biweekly parties for young New York Jewish singles. Pick-up lines and phone numbers were passed freely. One couple spent the evening making out as if they were at a high school dance. Three female friends traveled in from New Jersey with high hopes; at the only other Utopia Events party they attended, they all met men they dated for months. One of the women was still dating, but accompanied her friends to the party "just to look."

Cindy Urman admits that Chicago's JUF-sponsored singles parties are "meat markets." "I don't feel a sense of community, because it's every woman for herself out there. We're all competing for the same guys." Yet Cindy continues to go. "It makes it easier to know that any guy I meet there is going to be Jewish."

What's amazing is that the shame and fear that used to exist around placing personal ads, attending singles parties, and meeting people on the Internet have faded over the years among women of all ages. "I used to think that people who used online Jewish dating services or who went to Jewish singles events must be desperate," says Cindy. "Now I see these services as vehicles for meeting people who are committed to finding someone Jewish."

"More people are willing these days' to go to singles gatherings, confirms Angele Zebley, 29, who works at Utopia Events. Rather than viewing the Internet as competition, Zebley adds, "Online dating services have taken away the stigma from the dating scene."

The Jewish Bridget Jones Type

Both the feminist movement and the Internet allow women to be more assertive about "just looking." While romantic movies starring females swept off their feet by a dream partner still draw tears from women, most recent films depict women taking matters into their own hands. The recent hit novel (and movie) *Bridget Jones's Diary* shows the anti-heroine pursuing more than one man at a time to determine which one will last. Bridget Jones is supposed to typify the independence of the 21st-Century female, as evidenced by this personal ad that ran recently in New York magazine: "Bridget Jones Type—Without the British accent. Jewish professional, 48, female, seeks smart down-to-earth professional gentleman for whatever."

In April, the *New York Times* launched a Sunday personals section with its own SJFs (Single Jewish Females). Why now? Because love, or the search for it, is a guaranteed source of advertising revenue, the one thing that can be counted on to weather the storms of political movements, cultural fads, and dot-com downturns.

Logging On

Personal ads, however, are no longer the way of the thoroughly modern single. Internet dating sites are the place to go to find the largest pool of single men out there. Despite persistent rumors of a man shortage, recent U.S. census data show that single men in their 30s outnumber single women. Of the 50,985 Jewish-identified members on Match.com (*www.match.com*), one of the largest online dating sites, 51.2% are male.

Until she logged on to Match.com, where she eventually met her husband, Monica Lasky, a 34-year old lawyer living in

Meeting your *Bashert*

Bumping into your *bashert* (or "intended") on the street doesn't happen to everyone. Here are some ways you can take matters into your own hands.

Online Dating Services open the pool up to those outside your immediate geographic area, allow easy searching and communication 24 hours a day, help you narrow down your choices, and provide more information than personals ads. Try the following dating sites:
www.jdate.com; *www.match.com* (can specify whether you are looking for a Jewish partner)
www.jqs.com; *www.jewish.com/personals*

Jewish Community Centers and Synagogues sometimes offer discreet matchmaking services, but you won't know until you ask. Alternately, sign up for a sports team, a class, or a lecture (You never know what might happen.

Get Away on vacation with a group of Jewish singles. Club Getaway (*www.clubgetaway.com*) offers a weekend at their Kent, CT camp called Bagels and Jocks. J-Walking bills itself as "exotic adventures" for Jewish singles (*www.jwalking.com*).

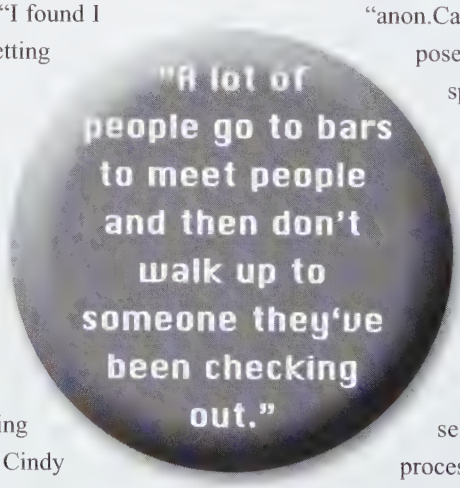
Go Public. Ask your friends to set you up. Hang out at your neighborhood's various cafes, museums and bookstores. Allow the chemistry to happen. (Amy didn't meet anyone through Drip's dating service, but she DID get a date after striking up a conversation in Drip's café).

- Want role models? You can view the "True Story of How Monica and Jonathan Met," including copies of their online profiles, photographs, and initial e-mail exchange, at *www.monicaandjonathan.com.*
- Find out the male-per-female ratio in any geographic area from the 2000 U.S. Census website at *www.census.gov.* Just click on Fact Finders and enter your address.
- Want some dating advice? Check out "Frankly Fran" at *www.matchscene.com* or "Ask Your Lovecoach" at *www.lovecoach.com.*

—R.M.

Chicago, assayed many of the ploys that young women are encouraged to try. She took pottery and Latin dance classes, joined a hiking club and volunteered for political campaigns. While Monica enjoyed the activities, "in terms of meeting people, it was exhausting—and not very efficient." After being set up by her mother and her mother's friends on "godawful" dates, including one that began with a phone conversation in which the man asked for her dress size, Monica finally decided to take matters into her own hand—and into the present day. "I found I was able to do far better on the Internet, setting *myself* up."

One of the biggest present-day obstacles facing singles is lack of time. And that's exactly why online dating sites are so popular, says Fran Greene, Director of Flirting and Dating for Match.com. "You can log on in sweatpants and fuzzy slippers at 11 p.m."



What's a "Dating Resumé"?

Match.com's website adds that its online dating service offers "viable solutions" for singles. Cindy speaks of the "pool of qualified candidates" at singles events as well as her "dating skills." All of this talk of efficiency, qualification, and skill makes it sound like dating has become a job hunt rather than the hunt for a soul mate. In fact, Fran Greene's advice is to "approach finding love as you would the job of your dreams." Taking on the tone of a human resources executive, Greene adds, "You should never leave your search up to chance."

"Waiting makes me frustrated," says Cindy Urman, "so I try to hurry it along." Cindy created her Jdate profile to stand out, in the same way that a job seeker writes a punchy cover letter to catch the attention of her potential employer. In response to the question, "What do you expect from a relationship?" Cindy's profile reads, "I expect to be treated like the goddess of the Jewish religion that I am."

Monica Lasky, when asked to choose a tagline for her Match.com profile, described herself as a "Smart, Sexy, Savvy SPF, Vibrant & Vivacious, Seeking Fellow Traveler for Adventure in Chicago and Beyond." Monica's husband, Jonathan, was drawn to her profile because she listed interests similar to his—progressive politics, intellectual conversation, ethnic food, and travel— and so he began an e-mail exchange that quickly led to a first coffee date. On the third date, Monica met Jonathan's dog, Cassady, the inspiration for his online name, "anon.Cassady18." One year later, Jonathan proposed to Monica in the same café where they spent that first date. (Note: Even in the Internet age, it was the guy who proposed marriage.)

Narrowing Down

But even if the woman is in charge, how does an online romantic narrow down the immense possibilities, especially since everyone online presents him-or herself as desirable? When Cindy Urman processes a search on Jdate for a Chicago man who fits her basic criteria, Jdate brings her 413 eligible men. Monica Lasky received an "overwhelming" number of responses to her Match.com profile, so she created a form rejection letter, which began, "Thank you for taking the time to respond to my profile. I appreciate your interest." Some women

claim that it's easy to do an initial screening because many men who respond to postings are obviously inappropriate, either because of their age or geographic location.

After narrowing down her two-week search based on location, Jewish observance, and commitment to a long-term relationship, one woman said she found seven men. She was attracted to one man's profile because he had posted a photograph of himself with his *bubbe*. "I knew that he must respect the women in his family and that his family was important to him." Another woman checked for spelling mistakes. Cindy pays attention to how much effort it appears a man put into writing his profile, and she favors wit. Monica Lasky was drawn to the "playful tone" of husband Jonathan's profile.

In general, these dating profiles seem to work best when both men and women post their photographs, and many women report getting no responses without a photograph. But beware of fraud. Nina Judd, who used to administer the Boulder Jewish Singles Profiles, a nonprofit dating service in Colorado run by the Boulder Jewish Community Center, warns, "So many people in Boulder like dogs that one person borrowed a friend's dog for the picture!"

Over 50

After searching profiles on Jdate, Judy Fish, a 58-year-old divorced woman in South Florida, chose seventeen men who met her criteria. None of the six men who responded would agree to communicate further unless she uploaded her photograph, which she did. Judy then went on a date with a man who, it turned out, had posted a photo taken ten years ago. "I wanted to write back and say 'What chutzpah! Do you think you're some god?'"

Anne Kohn, a social worker and former singles coordinator at B'nai Jeshurun synagogue in Manhattan, speculates that "finding a job might be easier than finding a partner," especially for older women. Judy has few opportunities to date because she works full time and looks after her mother, whom she moved to Florida to live with. Judy posted her profile on Jdate in January. So far, no men have responded.

"It's hardest for women in their 50s and above," says Anne Kohn, who had difficulties planning singles events at B'nai Jeshurun for older men and women. "Men don't want to be pegged into that age group."

But Leslie, 54, disagrees. A lecturer at an Ivy League university, she reports that she had no problems meeting men of her age online. "There were days I had a lunch date and a dinner date, with two different men." Leslie recently married a man she met on Goodgenes.com, an online dating site for faculty and graduates of Ivy League and other top-ranked schools. Leslie's is a classic Internet success story. She narrowed down her search to focus on certain desirable characteristics but "tried to be open to meeting even those men I thought were imperfect matches." One of the characteristics she remained flexible about was geography. Her husband lived 430 miles away, and her chances of meeting him through any other medium were obviously pretty slim.

Face to Face *vs* The 'Net

Does modern dating—with its anonymous parties and Internet sites listing dozens of criteria and encouraging faceless communication—lead to unrealistic romanticizing? Yes, says Nancy Slotnick, founder of Drip, the Manhattan coffee bar that helps people make a match. "You need to meet to know eighty percent about a person; otherwise, there's a tendency to idealize." Fran Greene doesn't think so. "Online dating services are a godsend. They enable you to fall in love from the inside out." However, Greene does encourage users of online dating services to make their transitions quickly from online to phone to in-person communication, relenting, "Not meeting in person quick enough can lead to false intimacy."

One woman—we'll call her Susan—had been set up on countless dates by friends and family, but always found it awkward to explain to each well-meaning matchmaker why "their half-brother or grandson whom they obviously thought adorable was not good enough." That's when she turned to Jdate. After going on thirteen dates in two weeks, during which the staff at the local Starbucks came to know her well, Susan became an expert at the quick and efficient date. Her tactic? She recommends that you plan to meet only for a short time, like a half an hour, on a first date. This way, you have a built-in excuse if the date doesn't go well.

The Man Who Came to Dinner

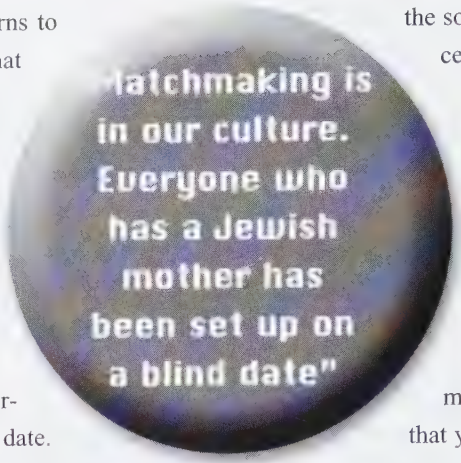
I was introduced to the man I married right in my own apartment, not through the Internet or at a big party, but in a way that seems almost quaint in this dotcom age.

Here's how it happened: We (a small group of New York women in our twenties) used to have regular pot-luck Shabbat dinners. What mattered was not necessarily the ritual—some people would continue to hang out at the apartment after dinner and others would go to the movies, or dancing—but the fact that people were meeting one another, and having actual conversations instead of screaming over the music at some bar. The snowball principle was in effect at these gatherings. We would invite over some friends, always letting them know that they could bring whomever they wanted—it didn't even matter if we had enough chairs. Some of the people would inevitably invite us back to dinner at their apartments, and then their friends would invite us over as well. Pretty soon, we had our own fluid community of eligibles, all eating (usually) delicious homemade food and talking in the most *heimisch* and comfortable of environments.

My partner was a friend of a friend; he came over for dinner one Friday night, and never really left.

—Rachel Kranson

Obviously, there are certain safety concerns to keep in mind when meeting someone that you've been corresponding with online. "You have the rest of your life to be alone together," says Greene, so the first time "meet in a public space and let someone know when and where you're meeting."



Give Love A Chance

Most singles cite fear as the biggest obstacle to meeting someone, and New York City is perceived as an especially difficult place to date. "There's this idea that there's always something better, someone else," says Deborah, 31. "People find one little thing that they use as an excuse. I know I do it." Deborah, who has an active social life, has never had problems finding a date. Through the softball team at Makor, the New York cultural center for Jews in their 20s and 30s, Deborah dated five men. "This one man was nice, attentive, attractive, and a great kisser. But two or three times, he said things that were really ignorant, and I was turned off completely."

"A huge roadblock for singles today is that they are too exacting about what they want," says Fran Greene. Her advice is to be more flexible. "You might have a stereotype that you won't date someone who's divorced, but it happens. Everyone has their own story."

Nina Judd says she ended up being "like a mother" to many of the people using Boulder's Jewish Singles Profiles, a dating service that allows paying members to search in person through hard-copy profile books of other members. For a time, Nina ran the service out of her house, where "sometimes I'd be cooking dinner and the singles, who were often lonely, would ask my advice." A lot of the singles that she met, especially women, were embarrassed to attend singles events and found online dating services too anonymous. Nina says her motherly touch acted "as a buffer."

Drip

"The first hardest task for anyone who is single is finding a place to meet people," says Fran Greene. "Everyone thinks of New York as a huge city," agrees Amy Lewis, "but the truth is that people do not usually leave their eight- to ten-block radius." The second hardest thing, continues Greene, is "once I'm in the venue, how do I do it?"

Nancy Slotnick, 34, got the idea for Drip in 1996 when she was single and searching, unsuccessfully, for places conducive to meeting someone. "A lot of people go to bars but don't walk up to someone that they've been checking out," says Slotnick. "Drip's designed to mitigate that." In fact, the name Drip does not refer to that last drop of coffee, but to the feeling of awkwardness sometimes experienced by single people on the lookout. "Everyone feels like a drip when they're dating," says Slotnick.

Drip charges you $10 to add a personal profile to the dozens of binders scattered around the café. They are labeled Men for Women, Women for Men, Women for Women, and Men for Men. Once you've selected a potential partner from the binders, Drip's staff does all the work for you. They find out if the other person is interested in you, then schedule a time

Continuity? or Jewish *Interruptus*?

For those young Jews who can't afford the cost of wine-and-cheese gatherings or large dance parties with liquor and music, or for those who are not heterosexual or just not interested, the Jewish community doesn't seem to have much to offer. For all the recent talk of continuity, young Jews interested in Judaism as a religion or culture, rather than in Jewish marriage as an end in itself, will find only the occasional class, lecture, activist group or cultural event. Those who do not fit into the category of young professional lawyer, banker or doctor often say they feel they live on the periphery of the agendas of organizations like Federation, whose young professional groups do not include a place for artists or activists and whose costs can be prohibitive.

Even for those on so-called professional tracks, the cost of singles events in one's early career is no small cash. At 24, Cindy Urman admitted to having to budget carefully in order to afford the $40 Hanukah party thrown by JUF, but she consoled herself with the thought that her money goes to charity. Think again. Parties such as the one Urman attends are usually not raising money for charity but merely covering costs.

Danna Bodenheimer, a 26-year old New York Jewish lesbian who was once the president of her college Hillel, now says it is so hard to find venues to meet lesbians that further limiting her specifications to Jewish would make dating almost impossible. "I would prefer to meet a Jewish woman," says Danna, whose many part-Jewish ex-girlfriends she met through friends, "though my parents would rather I meet a non-Jewish man."

Do events like film screenings, softball games and lectures geared to young people really foster Jewish community involvement? Robin Gorman Newman, author of How to Meet a Mensch in New York, laughs when asked whether those featured in Kosher Meet, a documentary film that tracks the lives of young New York Jewish singles on the make, will continue their involvement in the Jewish community after they marry. Commenting on whether men who turn up every week to New York's Hineini Torah study, classes at Aish HaTorah and B'nai Jeshurun's Shabbat services will continue to do so once they met their match, filmmaker Rebecca Raphael says, " For many people, a ring on the finger is the end of the torture of dragging themselves to these Jewish events." —R.M.

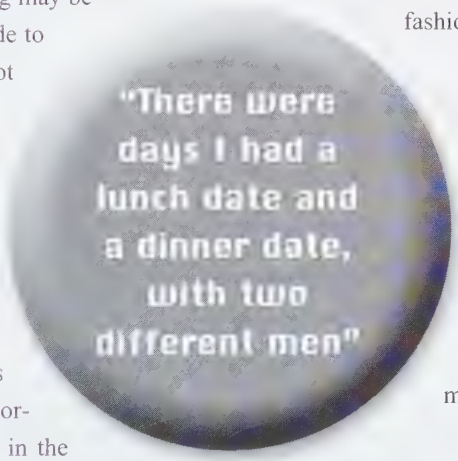
for the two of you to meet at Drip or at one of Drip's affiliate cafés, now opening in cities around the Northeast. Slotnick didn't originally have a place for the 31,000 singles who have completed Drip's profile to indicate religion or religious preference in a mate. But Jews went ahead and drew Stars of David on their forms. "Matchmaking is in our culture," says Slotnick. "Everyone who has a Jewish mother has been set up on a blind date."

The Persistence of those Stereotypes

In fact, the stereotypes that Jewish men have about Jewish women and vice versa seem to be more persistent than the stereotypes about singles on the lookout as desperate or crazy. "I see two kinds of Jewish men," says Deborah, 31, who hasn't dated a Jewish man since college. "Short, balding, husky guys with dark hair and glasses. Nice, but nerdy and totally unattractive. Then you've got the tall skinny guy who's also nerdy but who plays on a basketball team. He thinks he's cool because he's tall. Investment banker types."

"Men are angry at women for not giving them a chance," admitted Anne Kohn, the former singles' program coordinator who now leads intimacy workshops. "And women feel like men are seeking a certain look and don't give *them* a chance."

And no matter that the method of meeting may be very 21st Century, after the two of you decide to date, the serious "relationship work" is not much different from what it was in the pre-Internet era. (A little tougher, maybe, because you probably don't have friends in common to buttress your judgements of one another.) After the first flush of intimacy, say experts involved with the decades-old "Making Marriage Work" program at the University of Judaism in Los Angeles, you still have to decide what's important to you beyond what you've each listed in the online resume: Can you actually stand being alone indoors together on a rainy day? Is this *particular* human being your *beshert* (intended)? "Even a breakup can count as a success," says one counselor who works with couples, if it brings you closer to knowing what you really want—or don't want—in your significant other.



First Date Precautions

If you've never met her/him before, take precautions on a first date. Here are some suggestions from practiced online daters:

- Do not get picked up at your home or office.
- Arrange to meet in a public place.
- Tell a friend or family member where you will be and when.
- You do not have to give out your last name or phone number if you don't want to, and you may want to block your phone number through caller identification.
- Carry a cell phone, if you have one.
- Plan for your first date to be short—as short as 30 minutes. You can always stay a little longer if there's chemistry between you.
- If you feel uneasy during your face-to-face meeting, leave by cab or by public transportation rather than on foot or in your own car.

Anything Can Happen

Despite her impatience, Cindy, who never lets a dating opportunity pass her by, admits that "Ultimately, it's out of your hands. There are all of these options, but you still need old-fashioned chemistry."

Cindy thinks that in her parents' generation, "there were so many more opportunities to meet someone." With the advent of personals, online dating, and singles events, it seems that there are more venues to meet someone today, but it's harder to be discriminating. In Fran Greene's opinion, "Finding true love has not changed. What has changed is the way people are used to meeting people."

"I'll probably end up marrying someone I meet on the street," Cindy banters. That's no joke. Nancy Slotnick, who has built her empire around matching people, this summer married a man she met on a street corner. "We made eye contact and started talking as if we knew each other." In the 21st Century, anything can happen. Even love at first sight, and in real time. ■

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DONNA ROSENTHAL illustrations courtesy of the BERNICE STEINBAUM GALLERY, Miami, Florida.

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Beyond Forgiveness: Women, Can We Emancipate Ourselves from a Model Meant for Men?

BY RABBI SUSAN SCHNUR

The story of how Joseph was betrayed by his brothers—how they cast him naked into a waterless desert pit and then hoisted him back up for a better deal (cash from some south-trekking caravaneers)—is classically invoked as a tale of astonishing forgiveness. For although Joseph's brothers perpetrated against him the high criminal offenses of kidnapping and slave-trading ("If a man steal one of his brethren and treat him as a slave or sell him, then he shall die," Deuteronomy 24:7), and although they hated his guts, Joseph—a regular hairshirt of a *tzaddik*—responds with love, slathering on forgiveness as if it could make seedlings grow and crops yield their fruits. . . yea, as if forgiveness could stop a famine.

"You will dwell in the region of Goshen, where you will be near me," Joseph tells his brothers tenderly, in a classic moral-determinist fable of criss-crossed fortunes: he, the victimized little boy, risen to become granary vizier over all of Egypt, and they, the sociopathic brutes, now (in Dickensian fashion) helpless themselves and dependent on—wouldn't you know?—the boy they once put in a hole.

"You and your children and your grandchildren, your flocks and herds and all that is yours, there I will provide for all of you," Joseph vows, "that you will no longer suffer want, for there are yet five years of famine to come."

But how useful is it, we need to ask ourselves—or how destructive—to have Joseph, this paragon of boddhisattvic *rahmones*, held up to us as we wrestle our way out of our own desert pits, struggling to forgive those who have hurt us? For we sit in our High Holiday chairs as *real*—not idealized—people, wearing *real* stockings sticking with *real* sweat to our *real* thighs on these *really* uncomfortable metal folding chairs, and we stocktake, yet again, victimizations that—large and small—have insistently taken possession of parts of our lives, crippling our engagement in more positive things.

Yea, Joseph forgave his older brothers for wanting to *murder* him . . . but *we* can't stop *dreying* over the fact that our next-door neighbor continues to park in our driveway even though we have unambiguously told him not to. Yea, Joseph forgave his older brothers for selling him as a *slave*, for god's sake, but we have still not forgiven *our* older brothers for pedaling off ahead of us on the Atlantic City boardwalk forty years ago while we, terrified of getting lost, pumped frantically on our little trike, sobbing hysterically.

And as for more serious betrayals—a husband who has had an affair, a step-sibling who molested us, a dear friend who reneged on a substantial loan, a sister's lifelong self-centeredness, a father who emotionally neglected us, a body that's contracted multiple sclerosis, being middle-aged and unmarried and childless, being abandoned by society because we are fat . . . having Joseph held up to us as if his ability to forgive were *normal* . . . well, the truth is that working one's way through such painful injustices is an arduous and punishing and solitary task—one that we master, if at all, slowly and in bite-sized increments, and over many years. And the process does not in any way resemble Joseph's idealized and shallowly homileticized ability to forgive.

Furthermore, the place where we reach some resolution in our hearts in relation to the betrayal and are no longer ruminatively obsessed with the hurt or injustice, or actively under its omnivorous pall, may NOT be "forgiveness" at all, but rather indifference or detachment or unforgiving reconciliation. It may be partial forgiveness, or forgiveness with the stipulation that we will never again be in the same room with this person, or numbness or chronic ache. It is not, that is, that forgiveness is the bottom line, but rather that emotional resolution is. *That* is the real achievement and hard-won freedom.

And that *might* result in our feeding our brothers in Goshen, but —you know what?—it might just as legitimately result in our letting them starve. Indeed, the only clear thing about working

On Not Forgiving a Terrible Father

"Now, if you can hear me, Dad, tell me, just one time, tell me you love me."

In *Gimme A Kiss*, Lilly Rivlin's sad but very real and very wise documentary, the filmmaker/daughter interviews her elderly, deeply unlikable father. He is a double amputee in a hospital bed who makes his leg-stumps mug for the camera, caressing them like breasts and cat-whistling. "Yoo hoo!" he says to his daughter, pulling off two cotton caps and shimmying burlesque-style, "You wanna take a picture of my legs?" It's a revolting gesture full of unclaimed hostility, and it gives the viewer a heart-sinking glimpse of what Lilly and her siblings were up against having this crude man as their father. And that is what this film is about. J.B. (Julius) Rivlin was not only emotionally abusive to his wife and children, he was also a proud sexual philanderer. Sometimes he combined both by promising his children a car ride to some thrilling destination, only to abandon them in the car for panicky hours while he disappeared behind the front door of some girlfriend or other's.

But beyond the damage wreaked by this damaged man, the film depicts something quietly transcendent and heroic. For we hear middle-aged, once-traumatized siblings—all of whom seem still suffused in a kind of childhood sadness—speak in authentic, non-reactive voices about not forgiving their father. And we can feel, viscerally, how life-saving that is, what a feat of maturity. For in Julius's family, not forgiving was the only way to survive psychologically intact, the only way to triumph over the masochistic roles that a father forced on his family, the only way to stake a claim for one's basic right to *have* feelings, the only way to take on the dirty, thankless job of not colluding in Daddy's reckless indifference to the truth.

At one point in the film, Lilly says to her father matter-of-factly, "Why do you think you don't get along with any of your children?" "Who don't get along?," J.B. answers, "*they* don't get along with *me*." And in another scene, Lilly says, "Mom says you have a black son. I would like to meet him. Can I meet him?" "So you got a black brother?" J.B. laughs, and then denies having a black son, to which Lilly responds evenly, "You lie all the time."

Though each of these grown children has lifetime scars, unlike their father, they do not mug for the camera. On the contrary, their hard-won self-regard has bathed them in a kind of telltale luminescence. They speak out of *shlaymut*, out of wholeness and emotional resolution, and they express great clarity about who they are, what they value, and what they need. They "speak their truth" in their own voices, not in anyone else's, and they have each obviously struggled to love and forgive one person in particular: themselves. Lilly has become a truth-and-justice seeker; Dorothy, an advocate for both the getting and giving of love; Donny, a person who empathizes with people's limitations (including his father's and his own) and works towards the horizon of *tikkun olam*: His fathering, he tells us, has been a little bit better than Julius's, and his sons' will be a little bit better than that.

Standing at the gravestones of her parents, eight years after J.B.'s death, Dorothy describes the last time she saw their father: *"He was in intensive care. I said, 'Dad, I want to ask you, please. One thing you've never said to me in all my life, is that you love me. Now, if you can hear me, Dad, tell me, just one time, tell me you love me. Make me happy today. Tell me you love me.' And I'm sitting there talking to a dead man. 'Please tell me you love me,' and he wouldn't."*

Sometimes, indeed, learning *not* to forgive is the only thing that guides us towards redemption. —S.S.

Distributor: The Cinema Guild 212.685.6242

one's way through an emotional betrayal is the fact that, as our sages say, there is but one road through grief and pain, and that is the road through grief and pain. There are no shortcuts. And to the extent that received rabbinic Judaism, in general, holds up to us fairytale models of hairshirt *tzaddikim*—not just Joseph, but plenty of others—that, too, betrays us real folk.

"Exhorting people to forgive during the High Holidays might be an important civilizing prod for men, but for some women it's harassment."

Because it also happens to be the case that this over-simplification of the process of forgiveness is not, in these last few years, trotted out in a vacuum, but rather in the context of a contemporary world that has suddenly turned "instant forgiveness" into a veritable industry—Oprah effecting two-minute reconciliations of family feuds that have lasted a lifetime; "Forgiveness Weekends" cropping up at spiritual retreat centers everywhere you look ("$425," advertises one, "including aromatherapy, labyrinth, and a fully-equipped exercise gym"); and rabbis ratcheting up the rhetoric to suggest, as one recently did in his synagogue bulletin, that if we were truly good and moral people, we would just "do it."

For women in particular, though, whose emotional learning curve typically involves trying to *stop* ourselves from being pathological forgivers, such "just-do-it" models can be pernicious, even adding fuel to our ever-ready sense of personal shortcoming. Simon Wiesenthal, that beyond-reliable participant-observer of life at its least humane, expressed dismay that "today the world demands that we forgive [grave injustices], closing the account as if nothing had ever happened. Forgiving," he points out, "is an act of volition. *Only the sufferer is qualified to make the decision.*"

Indeed, in matters of the heart, it is not medieval rabbis or weekend gurus or even Oprah Winfrey in whom authority is vested; it is invested in each one of us—and in whatever fundamentally subjective process gets us to the other side.

. . . which brings us, during and after this Jewish penitential season, to a critique of the whole concept of forgiveness, which fails us on several counts.

First it is based on a faulty supposition: that forgiveness in and of itself, is inherently worthy, is the only moral choice. Indeed,

this is not the case. On the contrary, *not* forgiving can be a pre-condition for moving on into a reconstructed emotional life, especially, say, if your betrayer has impaired your sense of self, or mistreated you when you were young or were particularly vulnerable [see sidebar, page 17].

In a thoughtful new book by Jeanne Safer, *Forgiving and Not Forgiving*, the author describes a woman whose violent older brother used to terrorize her when they were kids, playing games that involved, for example, putting a screwdriver into her rectum. The family portrayed the brother not as dangerous or sociopathic, but rather as benignly "[not knowing] how to be friends." When the woman finally, after many years, takes a stand against this erasure of her experience—deciding that she will refuse her brother's phone calls and letting her family know that she will not attend family functions if he is present—her parents' "take" on her stance is that *she's* the one "destroying the family."

Safer describes the classic emotional double-bind that is often the lot of those who have been betrayed (especially women and children): On the one hand, we are harangued to "forgive and forget." But on the other, we are told that there *is* nothing to forgive and forget. In the case of this woman with the abusive older brother, years of "forgiving" him only re-sentenced her to that ice floe where her family had long ago remaindered her. Forgiving sanctioned her collusion in the false reality that her family painfully instituted at her expense.

This woman's healthy retaliatory measures—her refusal to take her brother's phone calls or be in the same room with him (her refusal to forgive, that is) was not only necessary to her healing, but also set up the conditions for the whole family (if they so chose) to face the facts and grieve those facts and begin to heal. Sometimes *not forgiving* is but a stop—maybe a really, really long one, but nevertheless not the final destination—on the life-span road to ultimate forgiveness. Indeed, sometimes there is only one thing that makes forgiving possible: *not* forgiving.

Second, forgiving is generally understood to be a black-and-white matter—either we "forgive" or we "don't forgive," and either we do it "now" or we do it "never." But this, in relation to deeply felt violations, is reductive, a misrepresentation of our experience, and a mockery of the complex continuum of resolutions that crystallize in the aftermath of a betrayal. We may partially forgive, vengefully forgive, contingently forgive, *not* forgive yet reconcile. We may mourn yet not forgive; achieve understanding yet only forgive certain parts of the betrayal; become indifferent; become detached. Forgiveness is comprised of lots of things.

And as for mandating that forgiveness happen *now*—during *this* spiritual season or *this* "forgiveness weekend"—well, that is likely to spawn only phony forgiveness, an experience of guilt and estrangement from our own real feelings that, for women in

Being Dumped by Your Sweetheart

. . . and Then There's Obsessional Not-Forgiving

NOT forgiving can be a completely appropriate resolution to traumatic abandonment or pain, but it can also be an inappropriate one. How do we know the difference? Fundamentally, if the issue is still unduly preoccupying us, if we brood about it, if it can still provoke an intense reactivity from us, if our distance or cut-off from the betrayer is but a step away from a cauldron of emotions that makes contact too difficult for us, then, indeed, we are not yet in a place of shlaymut, of resolution. (The Hebrew word has the same roots as shalom, peace.)

The feminist psychologist Harriet Lerner, in her trademark bull's-eye fashion, speaks to this issue in her new book, The Dance of Connection*:*

We can become attached to our pain . . to the idea that if we stay angry long enough, and keep thinking about it hard enough, the person who wronged us will realize how terribly they've treated us—which won't ever happen, of course. It's hard to give up the magical fantasy that hanging on to justified rage will someday force the other person to suddenly see the light and come groveling back to apologize and, most important, to feel equally, if not more, miserable than we ourselves feel. And while we're sitting there ruminating about the terrible actions of our [betrayer], that person may be out having a wonderful day at the beach. The fact that we're the only one suffering may be the best argument for stepping back from a negative attachment.

Did Mary, for example [summarily abandoned by her fiance], have to forgive Bob? Of course not. Nor should she forget what he did to her, because what happened is a very real part of her history. But she did need to make Bob less of a force in her life. Negative intensity preserves our [connection] with the other person as surely as does positive intensity. Mary's anger was the glue that ultimately kept her stuck. "Moving on"—months or years after the betrayal—doesn't mean forgetting or whitewashing the other person's behavior. It means [refusing to let] chronic anger and bitterness rule our lives, dissipating our energy and sapping our creativity. If five percent—or 75 percent—of our energy is directed toward hating someone who has wronged us, then that same percentage is not available for other pursuits.

The challenge for Mary was [to work towards allowing] her negative feelings to recede, so that she could feel more powerful, peaceful and whole. She needed to honor and protect herself by refusing to let painful emotions loom so large in her day-to-day life. She [had to give up] wanting him to suffer in the way that he had made her suffer—a perfectly normal human impulse.

Later Mary told me that the hardest part of the whole ordeal was her belief that Bob didn't really feel sorry. "I'm innocent, and I'm the one who's suffering. He's a shmuck who doesn't look back. I'd like to think that what goes around comes around."

But more important than whether or not Bob pays a price for his behavior . . . is that Mary stopped holding on to her pain as a way to prove what damage Bob had done.

—S.S

particular, points towards despair. Indeed, superficial "forgiving" actually interferes with authentic emotional resolution, putting true forgiveness—if it had been in the cards at all—perpetually out of reach. The "real stuff"—the *shlaymut* ("wholeness"), as Marcia Cohn Spiegel puts it—that we work towards in our hearts, evolves *in its own good time*, as our lives—and those of our betrayers'—pick up speed and victories and losses.

An abusive father, for example, may be the object of his daughter's hatred until she herself becomes a parent and witnesses first-hand her spouse's loving fathering. Somehow that emotional experience ushers her into mourning what will never be—her own experience of having a father like that—which, in turn, frees her up to see her father three-dimensionally for the first time—not only as this abusive guy, but as a complex human being struggling with his own profound losses. And as her father softens emotionally (and becomes ill and dependent) in old age, he too changes: becoming a loving grandparent. In response to this, the daughter's feelings transmute again, into something akin to compassion.

"Tincture of time," as physicians call it, is always a primary ingredient in the work of *shlaymut*, of emotional resolution. If, this Rosh HaShana, your heart stays put in "not-forgiving land," respect that. Forgive *yourself,* for a change. Take the posture of your heart seriously.

Third, forgiveness is advanced as a one-size-fits-all commodity, abandoning many of us non-forgivers to self-flagellation: Judy and Ben were victimized by Professor X just like I was—yet *they've* moved on and "forgiven," what's wrong with *me*? Nothing. The same betrayal means very different things to very different people.

If your sweetheart dumps you, say, just as she has dumped a string of other girlfriends before you, each one of you will respond to the abandonment from your own authentic subjectivity: *this* dumped girlfriend, say, finds a more supportive sweetheart and pretty much works the issue through; *that* girlfriend has childhood abandonments that get painfully stirred up again in the face of this fresh injury—it will take her a good while to stop feeling utterly bereft; this third woman believes that she will never have another romantic relationship in her life and that her own faults precipitated the break-up; this fourth girlfriend doesn't consider being dumped an injury at all–she just sees the perpetrator as a sad sack with a lot of problems. None has the "right" response—there is no such thing. Each is simply being herself. As the psychologist Harriet Lerner puts it, "Being yourself is a job only you are qualified for."

"Forgiving," then, is a fundamentally unequal opportunity provider—no two people *ever* share the same context. Just because your husband has forgiven your daughter for a significant injustice doesn't mean that *you* can. Indeed, his taking the "good cop" role might have relinquished to you the untaken "bad cop" one. Classically, family members take on roles very much in relation to one another, and in relation to who is more easily seduced into filling unclaimed vacuums.

Finally, and perhaps most important to LILITH readers, forgiveness, in and of itself, is a gendered issue. In the seasonal Jewish work of "forgiveness" that confronts us during the Days of Awe, this means that male liturgists and scholars through the ages have formulated their ideas about forgiveness in relation to male, not female, character—and males, as most of us can attest, typically struggle with the kinds of feelings that get aroused through both the granting of forgiveness (an act that can feel shamefully sissified) and the requesting of it (that can feel craven, too). As two college-aged males in a recent workshop on gender put it, "Asking somebody to forgive you is a blow to your self-esteem. It makes you feel vulnerable and undefended, like a girl." Added the other, "It's worse than asking for directions."

Indeed, 'I did something wrong' is much harder for most males to say than it is for most females—for good reasons. As children, males are shamed about their perceived "weaknesses," and, as psychotherapists can attest, shamed children generally grow up to be people who find it extremely difficult to apologize. Also, most Dads don't do much apologizing, so that becomes the model passed on to their sons.

The statements "I'm sorry" and "I forgive you," then—*the mene mene tekel ufarsin* of the High Holiday season—fundamentally are meant to correct for male socialization. They are pro-social code-words meant to restore connection and interpersonal harmony. In my congregation the kids sing, "Let's be friends, make amends, now's the time to say 'I'm sorry'" (a ditty, with plaintive hand motions, that continues, "*please* say you'll forgive me" and "take my hand and I'll take yours"), frontloading, of course, the social harmony theme of the Days of Awe. The in-your-face incantations of the season—"I'm sorry" "I forgive you"—*need* to be in your face if you're a guy, as they are in opposition to almost all other behavioral injunctions and must transcend them. Asking for and granting forgiveness are, if you will, religious trump cards, an eleventh commandment that sanctions, for men, doing pro-social things without suffering shame.

Which brings us to female socialization, and the fact that women are systematically steered towards maintaining connections, even at great personal cost. If you imagine, say, King Solomon's adjudication in relation to the two mothers who both claimed rights to the same baby ("cut the child in half"), and you change the parents into Dads—well, the story kind of fizzles, it just doesn't have the same emotional oomph, which derives not only from the mothers' ferocity of attachment when they first come to see Solomon, but, more viscerally, from the real mother's willingness to sacrifice herself, as it were, for this child. That's, in particular, the part that deeply resonates as female.

We females, indeed, know that we say "I'm sorry" to a fault—even when we're the ones being victimized! Forgiving is easy for us; it's *not* forgiving that's the struggle. We are over-socialized to stay connected, to "make peace," to make sure nobody is offended, to forget to ask if we ourselves are offended. Indeed, this is perhaps the core of our gender socialization.

(continued on page 45)

Finessing the Whole Issue of Forgiveness: Using Art To Precipitate Mourning

THE HOLOCAUST AND EXPERIMENTAL THEATRE

Tamar Rogoff, a 54-year-old experimental-theatre artist and choreographer, is famous for turning impossible things into "art." She did a show in which the actors were six-month-old babies, another in which the actors were both blind and deaf, and yet a third in which a plot unfolded—is this improbable, or what?—through honest-to-God insomniacs trying to get sleep in various nooks and crannies of the theatre. "I love the challenges of creating art in the face of hurdles," Rogoff says with characteristic understatement. "You're never on automatic."

Summer in Ivye, however, Rogoff's 70-minute film, takes the prize for Most Astonishing Leap of Artistic Faith. For she assembled 34 professional actors from five countries (ages 5 to 91), seven translators, three seamstresses (to create dozens of 1930's costumes), ten professional dancers and musicians, 19 children, five local elderly Jews to serve as both "living historians" and "actors," and many townsfolk from the little village of Ivye to manage the soup kitchen that daily fed Rogoff's 100-person crew during weeks of rehearsals and performances.

Rogoff's "stage," she decided, would be the forest of Ivye (in Belarus—*Summer in Ivye* was first a live theatre piece, then made into this film), and the audience would troop around from scene to scene, each hidden in various copses in the woods. And the story that she would dramatize would be that of the Jewish community of Ivye *before* May of 1942. In April of 1942, the town was 76% Jewish. But on a single day in May, the Nazis shot 2500 Jews in Ivye, every person who could not be used for slave labor. The mass grave site (actually two long trenches where Jews were murdered and piled up) was now two enormous raised rectangles of grass with a brick wall on one side and a wrought-iron gate on the other, hulking at the far edge of the forest. Rogoff decided that she would stage the last scene of her play there.

Why Ivye? Rogoff's grandfather had immigrated to the US from Ivye, and throughout Rogoff's childhood he reminisced about the village as if it were *gan eden*. Her father had spent a summer there, with his grandfather, in 1935, and he kept a diary, rhapsodizing as well about the town's warmth and beauty, and about the extraordinary richness and breadth of Jewish life there. "I didn't know until I showed up in the town one day, on a lark—I happened to be in Lithuania," says Rogoff, "that 29 Rogoffs had been murdered by the Nazis. My father didn't tell me, and I didn't ask. The few Jews left in Ivye showed me a hand-lettered book of all the names. They were

so excited that I was a Rogoff. I decided that I owed it to these 'names' to figure out how to mourn them."

Rogoff followed her feelings. "I had a childish wish to spend time with my relatives, to see what it was like to be put to bed by them, to be lifted in the air by them, to be there at the *Pesach* table, to be at their weddings, to smell like them, and walk like them, and have eyes that twinkled like theirs. I wanted to fill the woods with the Jews of Ivye. I knew the forest itself was shouting history—people had walked to their deaths there. But I felt equipped to go for the 'life.'"

And indeed the videotape of the project—capturing not just a performance but the whole experience—rehearsals, the reactions of Jewish and non-Jewish 'actors' recruited from the town, the Babel of languages, the children dressed in 1930s school uniforms gorging on blueberries in the forest, their tongues blue—is almost unbearably moving. For what Rogoff has managed to do is 'unbury' the unmourned and let them stand for themselves, so that then, perhaps, they can be properly buried.

In the play itself, the audience follows the show's protagonist—the eminent and charismatic Lithuanian actor, Kostas Smoriginas—through the woods, creeping up to eavesdrop on one little "scene" after another: a teenager crouches behind some bushes, showing a younger boy how to inhale a cigarette; a *rebbe* is carried from the train station by his singing disciples; an old man feeds his old wife cherries, kissing her between each bite ("Walk on by! Don't stare at them!" Smoriginas scolds the audience); a middle-aged couple in a doorframe anxiously hands over their samovar to a young blond woman for safekeeping; a teacher takes roll in her classroom and each child shouts, "Here!"; four men—half dancing—play a game of cards, comically rotating seats; a *melamed* and a *yeshiva bocher* snore on their piles of books; a little girl is put to bed by her grandfather, who first takes her for a ride on his cane and then recites the bedtime prayer (printed in large Hebrew letters across her goose-down comforter); a lazybones shoemaker lounges on his elbow . . . each idiosyncratic vignette (just shards of vignettes, really) heartbreaking in their particularity, so "real"—so much the stuff that theatre's not made of—that it takes one's breath away. The feeling, as the audience moves through the trees, becomes one of stealth and magical surprise—like stumbling on a deer and her fawns while hiking, or on wood sprites, suddenly realizing that of course they exist.

By the time the theatre audience gets to the imposing mass grave site, they are stunned to realize that there are suddenly Jews to mourn, many of them: the schoolboy who got kissed by the brazen girl; the group of friends who huddled around one another, burying candlesticks; the old woman tending her nutty 'garden' made up of hundreds of knives and forks sticking upright in the soil; the middle-aged couple entranced with each other, dancing dreamily between the trees; the lazy shoemaker; the old, rotund woman who stepped forward when the director of *The Dybbuk* yelled in frustration, 'Mother! Show them how to do it!," and she did—each of them having crept up, their scenes finished, to hide behind the monument's massive wall, and then silently pop their heads up over it. The film viewer sees tears rolling down audience members' cheeks. Indeed, Rogoff has surprised all of us, for we feel ourselves suddenly mourning, although we hadn't really known that there was anything we'd failed to mourn.

During a film interview in an Ivye resident's home, an elderly Jewish woman, who in May of 1942 was a little girl, tells Rogoff, "We have been sitting around this table talking for years, waiting for this to happen."

Somehow, art has let people grieve. It hasn't asked us to forgive; it hasn't asked us not to forgive. It has asked us to unbury a handful of grownups and teenagers and children, to let them live for one oblivious hour . . . and then let them, like little ghosts, slip back to the grave.

—S.S.

The film is available from Habitual Films, 718-499-6914; fax: 718-499-2154; lac@panix.com]

JEWISH WOMEN'S EGGS

A HOT COMMODITY IN THE IVF MARKETPLACE

BY SUSAN WEIDMAN SCHNEIDER

EGG DONOR REQUIRED. Couple seeks egg donor. We prefer as follows: R1500 SAT, 18-28 years old, 5'5"-5'9", healthy, attractive, athletic, at least one Jewish grandparent. Compensation $25,000. Email photos and scores . . .

Advertisements for Jewish women's eggs—like this one, which appeared in the Columbia University Spectator last April—have been running in college papers at Brown, Harvard, Princeton and other elite schools across the country. Even more-explicit ads appear regularly in The Justice, the Brandeis student paper, where a "Professional Jewish couple" offers a young woman with four Jewish grandparents payment of up to $50,000 for her eggs. New techniques have made in-vitro fertilization simple, if not cheap, and Jewish women's eggs appear to be a hot commodity in this growing market.

Why *Jewish* eggs? Most infertile couples, given the choice, would like to have a donor whose genetic material pretty much matches their own. So Jews look for a Jewish donor, hoping she will feel ethnically and culturally like themselves. And why the high prices? Jews are a small minority outside of Israel, making the search for a donor of similar background.

In addition, there is the weighty matter of Jewish law. Some Orthodox Jews are concerned that eggs donated by a non-Jewish woman will not be considered halachically Jewish, since Jewish identity has traditionally been established through the maternal line. Some Jews using "assisted reproduction" to have a child want to make sure that they are in accordance with the strictest interpretation of Jewish law on this subject, which would include using only an unmarried donor (to avoid problems of creating a *mamzer*—a child born to a woman who is married to someone other than the father). Because even many non-Orthodox Jews adhere to the notion of matrilineal descent—that is, that the religion of the mother determines the religion of the child—there is more concern among Jews about the religion of an egg donor than of a sperm donor. To ensure Jewish identity, which in Israel also automatically confers citizenship, some couples or individuals want a donor who can prove her Jewishness-by-birth for several generations.

The people placing the ads may be egg brokers (a whole new profession), or they may be the "intended parents" themselves. The infertile women soliciting these eggs are looking for egg donors who are, in many ways, themselves half a generation younger. Or perhaps like an *idealized* version of themselves: "High SAT scores, good schools, talented, slender." The amounts of "compensation" offered are high-from $5,000 to $50,000, making the ads at the higher end of the spectrum a real come-on for young women with college loans and not much sense of what risks may be involved in the egg-donor process. "I'm a grad student with no money, and no time to go out and earn money," said a Columbia Ph.D. candidate interviewed for this article who had considered becoming an egg donor "for about 10 minutes."

Why all these ads now?

Infertility has struck Jewish women with a vengeance. American women in general choose to have their first child at a later age than ever before. Between 1985 and 1994, the proportion of births to women in their 20s in dropped from 62 percent to 53 percent. The proportion of births to women 30 to 44 increased from 25 percent to 34 percent, according to the American Infertility Association. And Jewish women, the best educated subset of women in North America, tend to stay in college and

graduate school for more years than other women, thus becoming the group most likely to delay marriage and childbearing. Because fertility declines with age, many unexpectedly find themselves infertile just when they're ready to have children. Responding to an article on abortion rights, a Washington, D.C. journalist commented, "Frankly, for my friends in their 30s and 40s, the biggest worry now is not an unwanted pregnancy, but just trying to get pregnant in the first place."

Reproduction—new technologies and the attendant moral and political issues—are at the top of the news. President Bush holds forth on embryonic stem cell research. A divorced man appeals to New Jersey State Supreme Court to use fertilized embryos from his ex-wife. A brother and sister, children of Holocaust survivors, use his sperm and a donor's egg so that she, a lesbian in her 50s, can bear a child to perpetuate some of their decimated family's genes.

The confluence of increased involuntary infertility and new scientific possibilities brings in its wake many important issues-medical, legal, emotional and social—for women trying to conceive. But for young Jewish women who are being asked to assist others in having children, the consequences have until now gone largely unexamined.

New reproductive technologies have become more sophisticated, and as professional women who have postponed childbearing face fertility challenges, they're willing to use these technologies and to pay for them. Though fertility medications offer some hope, they are not magic, and pregnancy outcomes from these treatments are generally poor. So women who still want to bear a child must consider other options. One of these is in-vitro fertilization (IVF), a process whereby eggs are "harvested" from a younger donor (whose eggs have a better chance of producing a successful pregnancy) and fertilized in a lab by sperm, possibly from the woman's own partner. The fertilized eggs are implanted as embryos in the intended mother's womb.

Intended mothers who are infertile because of delay may be high-achieving, smart and accomplished. Understandably, they tend to seek eggs from younger versions of themselves. These same younger women (absent a massive change in assumptions by career-oriented women—and men) may themselves be in this boat 15 years down the line. Having also postponed childbearing while in college, in graduate school and on a career path, they too may face difficulties getting pregnant or staying pregnant after 35. It is an irony worthy of Chekhov or Strindberg. Young women are now being courted for their eggs during their most fertile years in order to enable women slightly older to become gestational mothers; yet after having helped to produce these babies, they may be incapable, later on, of becoming pregnant themselves.

Dilemmas for the Donors

Susan Katzman, a California attorney specializing in contracts between egg donors and the intended parents, says that "the motivation is not supposed to be money. It should be to help the infertile couple." And some donors are reported to have felt elated at doing good while at the same time getting a significant amount of money. Perhaps in an ideal world egg donors would be motivated exclusively by a desire to help, but most women in their twenties interviewed for this article—women who, granted, decided NOT to become egg donors—initially considered the possibility for financial reasons.

Though the ads stress high achievers, none of these women matching the ideal donor profiled in the ads had actually gone beyond a preliminary consideration of egg donation before rejecting the prospect. Despite the fact that, as one college senior mused, "It's pretty tempting, since I have a lot of student loans," the conclusion was not to proceed even as far as e-mailing the advertiser. Most agencies report that they barely see "a handful" (the image that came up again and again) of Jewish egg donors in a year. "It's like your mother always said," quoted the Columbia graduate student, "'There's no such thing as a free lunch.' I decided not to do it because you've got to get your body all pumped up with hormones. And you have to abstain from sex for months."

The website for Fertility Alternatives has a special page entitled "Jewish Fertility," where a prospective parent can view photos of college graduates and see their (not usually stellar) SAT

For more than two decades, LILITH has been following the story of contemporary Jewish women's fertility through its various permutations. The cover story of issue # 3, an article entitled "The Population Panic," told "Why Jewish leaders want Jewish women to be fruitful and multiply." It featured the outraged responses of some women protesting what they felt was a "barefoot and pregnant" motif trying to draw them back from feminism's gains. Ten years later, the same author wrote about "The 'New' Infertility," exploring the feelings of childless couples and the experiences of a Jewish surrogate mother. In 1996, articles on Jewish single mothers who'd had children without partners concluded with the first-person piece "You Don't Have a Daddy, You Have a Donor." LILITH's cover stories have focused not only on gestational motherhood, but also on adoption—from three perspectives: the infertile mother, the adoptee and, most recently, in "Sex and Shame in a Different Era," Jewish birth mothers who, years ago, relinquished their babies for adoption.

Buying and Selling: The Metaphors of Assisted Reproduction

BY ELEANOR J. BADER

Advertisements soliciting Jewish women to become egg donors run the gamut: from childless couples wishing to buy eggs to those wishing to arrange a private adoption or find a surrogate mother to bear their child. Call it reproductive capitalism, a laissez-faire system of buying and selling on the open market.

Advocates of reproductive capitalism specifically target college-age women—preferably from top-ranked schools—as the laborers of choice. Consumers, in this case infertile women, are lured by the prospect of a solution to their problem, a way to get—or buy—what they most want: a healthy, smart, and socially adjusted newborn baby.

Assisted Reproductive Technology [ART] is big business, and by all accounts it is expected to get bigger in coming years. Approximately 400 clinics across the United States—up from 187 in 1990—currently specialize in infertility treatment. Professionals project an annual growth rate of nine percent through 2004, which if true, will create an unprecedented network of doctors, lawyers, administrators and medical technicians, all of whom stand to profit from fertility care. In 1996 alone more than six million Americans spent approximately $2.6 billion on infertility care. RESOLVE: the National Infertility Association, estimates that 25 percent of the total U.S. health care budget for that year went to treatment. Sans calculations for physical pain, the process of using a donor egg for in-vitro fertilization will cost the "intended mom" between $15,000 and $25,000, and fewer than one-third of health insurance plans cover infertility treatments.

Jews and Asians, are particularly hard-hit by infertility. Demographers attribute this to the tendency to forestall pregnancy until graduate or professional degrees are completed. Infertility among 35-44 year olds is 21.4 percent. What's more, women over 40 have a 30 percent higher infertility rate than younger women. And Jewish women, as a group, are likelier than most to be past their fertile prime when they first try to conceive.

If this delay causes the woman to have trouble conceiving, she may seek medical intervention. Egg donation is one possible solution to her infertility. To begin, not every fertile woman can be a donor. Fertility Awareness Inc., a San Diego, California agency that deals with the problem, is one of hundreds of private, for-profit programs that run without government oversight or regulation. Marketing themselves as specialists in "Jewish surrogacy and egg donation," they require "donor candidates" to be between the ages of 19 and 31, although their website states that Jewish and Asian donors can be accepted to age 33 because of "shortages" in these communities. They claim that "all donors are attractive, intelligent and healthy physically, emotionally and genetically. As well they must be within normal height/weight ranges. Absolutely no smokers, drug users or obese applicants will be accepted." The group also boasts another category of donor. Called "exceptional women," these donors are under 30 and "have a college degree or are currently attending a major University, with excellent grade point average [3.5+] and SAT/ACT scores [1400+SAT; 28+ACT]. These donors also have proof of their academic status or are willing to undergo an I.Q. test if requested."

Once a donor passes arduous physical, psychological and genetic screening processes—including tests for HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases--she, the agency and the "intended parents" negotiate a "compensation rate." Although the sale of body parts is illegal in the United States, egg donors typically receive between $2,500 and $50,000. Dubbed a "donation," the payment "compensates" the donor for "inconveniences" encountered. "Egg donation can be physically and psychologically difficult, as well as time consuming," says the American Society for Reproductive Medicine. The Society's Medical Ethics Committee agrees that women should be offered a financial incentive for donating their eggs to infertile couples. But, the group cautions that "the amount should not be so great that it clouds a women's judgment and blinds her to potential risks." Top payment, they state, should never exceed $5,000.

What Happens Before Your Eggs Can Be "Harvested"

The process begins with a visit to an endocrinologist who prepares the woman for "egg retrieval." This involves daily hormone injections for between four to six weeks, and usually the woman injects herself. During this time the donor must be sexually abstinent. Among the hormones used is Lupron, a drug that puts the body into a temporary menopausal state complete with hot flashes, nausea and vaginal dryness. A follicle stimulant is also administered. This causes severe bloating as the ovaries become larger and larger; the swelling usually lasts two to three weeks after the eggs are retrieved. Another drug, called HCG, is administered intramuscularly exactly 40 hours before surgery. The operation itself is done laparascopically, on an out-patient basis. Fifteen to 20 eggs are usually retrieved, a number five to six times higher than the number released without hormonal intervention.

About 48 hours after the eggs are gathered and combined with sperm in a petri dish, the "intended mother" is inseminated with three to four embryos. Within two to three weeks she will know if she is pregnant, a victory claimed by 25 to 35 percent of in vitro fertilization [IVF] patients. Despite this relatively low rate of success, one in five multiple births is attributed to IVF. The egg recipient, like the donor, has received hormones to increase her receptivity to implantation. Numerous side effects are likely to ensue, including hot flashes, headaches, irritability, joint pain and breast swelling.

But beyond the physical risks of egg donation, retrieval and implantation lie other concerns. Among the most controversial: the issue of "designer babies." Barbara Katz Rothman, sociology professor at City University of New York, is the author of *The Book of Life: A Personal and Ethical Guide to Race, Normality and the Implications of the Human Genome Project*. She is horrified by what she sees as the resurgence of eugenics and the classism implicit in fertility marketing. "In a system of donating gametes in which banking is the dominant metaphor, sperm and eggs are naturally sorted by 'worth.' That forces us to confront the question of what makes for worth in human beings. We don't like to speak about eugenics anymore, but it is hard not to think of eugenics when people are actively seeking the very best genes money can buy," she says.

Tali Amit, a 21-year-old senior at Brandeis University, likens the process of creating a "perfect" child to wishful thinking. "You can have Einstein's genes but certain things in the environment can stifle intellect or nurture it. You can be born with average intelligence but there is a big environmental component to who you're going to become as a person. I don't understand people who make a plan for what their child will be. Will they love the baby less if she or he doesn't meet their expectations?"

Jamella Jones, a scholarship student at an Ivy League college, sees the ads in her campus newspaper as a personal affront. "Why aren't the people looking for egg donors asking for me, a smart, tough, low-income woman who works incredibly hard, a biracial person with what it takes to excel as a minority in a mostly white upper-class school?" she asks.

Indeed, what does it mean that women's eggs are being treated like any other commodity? Rabbi Tsvi Blanchard, Director of Organizational Development at the National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership [CLAL] and a psychologist in family practice, says that one goal—not yet possible with today's technology—would be the creation of a repository in which resources are shared. "The Jewish community could create a fund of eggs for women who need them. They'd be available as an act of chesed, an act of love."

"From a rabbinic point of view," he adds, "the narrow self involvement that says, 'If I can have it who cares about you,' is a horror. Jewish moral vision is about a covenantal relationship between human beings. Choice and autonomy are good values but they get strained by an obsession with individuality and commodification of the individual. In America, if you want to have a child but can't, it's not my problem unless you want to buy a solution from me."

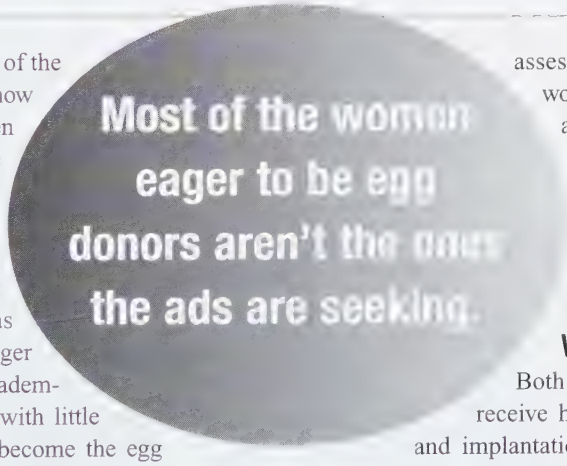
Unexamined in much of the conversation about egg donation is the social insistence that a woman is incomplete if she does not bear biological offspring.

"There are thousands of children available for adoption," says New York City reproductive rights activist Tracey Davidoff. "These kids are here, in the flesh and in need, but most people who purport to be devastated by their inability to have a child reject them. Instead, they seem to believe that without a biological connection, a child is not fully theirs. It's like the environment—the home life a household creates—is an insignificant factor in promoting familial bonding."

Still, Davidoff does not completely reject technology. "Carrying an embryo created by someone's egg and your partner's sperm is certainly an option for those with the money to buy it," she says. "But the political implications of egg selling and retrieval—especially when particular kinds of eggs are purchased—are really very scary." Although many infertile women say they are looking for a match with an egg donor who shares some of their own characteristics, Davidoff fears genetic engineering in the process of donor selection. "Are we sure we're ready for a Brave New World where white skin, tall, thin bodies, high standardized test scores and heterosexual behavior trump every other possibility? I shudder at the thought."

ELEANOR J. BADER is co-author, with Patricia Baird-Windle, of *Targets of Hatred: Anti-Abortion Terrorism* (St. Martin's Press, 2001).

scores and academic credentials. Some of the egg donors make statements about how much they want to help infertile women become pregnant, but most of the women eager to be donors do not appear to be the "exceptional" women the ads are seeking. Which may be why, even without an ad, one Jewish student on an Ivy League campus was approached in public last year by a stranger who had heard about her outstanding academic record, liked her looks, and asked (with little preamble) if she would be willing to become the egg donor for this infertile woman's child! (The answer was no.)



So who *are* the Jewish donors? "A number of women from the Mideast who are not from the Ivy League," says Patricia Mendell, director of support-line services for the American Infertility Association and a psychotherapist in New York who evaluates and counsels egg donors for IVF programs. Mendell, who also has worked with Russian Jewish egg donors, says "The Israelis are an interesting group of women. They have been in the Israeli army, and they are taking time off to travel, or saving money for college, or sending money back to their families in Israel for schooling. It's hard sometimes for your highly educated Jewish professional women [to accept such donors at first]. You are not going to get that stamp of Harvard or Columbia, so you're making a judgement call. There are ways of looking at someone to assess their being bright and their other wonderful qualities; they've been in the army and have had to prove their intelligence. These women usually get just the standard sum of $5,000, and they are for the most part fabulous clients. They are compliant about medication, they follow the rules."

What are the risks?

Both the egg donor and the egg recipient receive hormones to prepare for egg harvesting and implantation of the fertilized embryo. Both face possible loss of bone-mineral density from the hormones that mimic menopause, taken at a certain point in the cycle, and other hormones represent some potential cancer risk to both women. A new brochure on assisted reproductive technologies (ART) from American Jewish Congress states that "Although currently available data is reassuring, it has been hypothesized that repeated treatment with gonadotropins can lead to an increased risk of ovarian cancer." This pamphlet focuses on the risks to the egg recipient, for whom there are great and obvious benefits if ART is successful. For the egg *donor*, the non-monetary benefits are less apparent.

Young women are often not fully aware of the physical and emotional consequences in becoming egg donors. These risks include hormone treatments and surgery [see box, page 24],

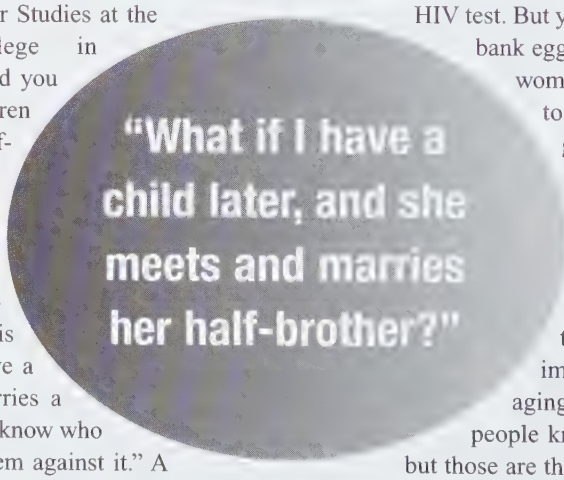
procedures very different from the virtually risk-free situation of a male who elects to become a sperm donor. And while men can become sperm donors even into their 50s, women are sought as egg donors when they are barely able to vote, because that's when they are thought to be at their most fertile. "There are no laws governing the age at which one can become an egg donor, but some of the guidelines for egg donors should be rewritten." says Jeane Ungerleider-Springer, director of psychological services at Boston IVF, the country's largest for-profit IVF firm. She warns that "Eighteen- or 21-year-olds are too young to make informed decisions about whether to undergo the treatments that are necessary to become an egg donor."

Some prospective egg donors want to donate eggs to a friend or relative who is having difficulty conceiving. Reports from IVF professionals say that these circumstances spurring egg donation may make for complicated emotional entanglements later on. Ungerleider-Springer says egg donations from a sister or a friend (the most common circumstances in which a Jewish woman becomes a donor, she says) have unique psychological issues. "In cases like this, all parties need to be involved in the counseling, including the spouse of the donor, if she is married."

Do you tell?

"It's very hard to find a Jewish egg donor who will be anonymous," says Ungerleider-Springer of women who might become donors for an unknown recipient. Donating eggs to a known recipient raises the chance that later in life the egg donor (even despite legal agreements to the contrary) may want to have a connection to the child her egg has helped produce.

There is the additional complication of what the donor might tell her own children. While the website of the American Infertility Association has a helpful and compassionate article under its FAQs about what to tell a child who has been conceived with the help of a donor egg, there is almost no guidance on what a donor might want to tell *her* present or future children. Lori Lefkowitz, director of Kolot, the program in Gender Studies at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College in Philadelphia, poses the question: "Would you even tell your other children, or the children you might have later, that they have a half-sibling out there somewhere? Don't you feel you might need to, both to be frank with them and in case they encounter that person later in life?"



One young woman who had considered egg donation was very clear that this is what had stopped her. "What if I have a child later and that kid meets and marries a half-brother or half-sister? I would never know who my child was out there to even warn them against it." A realistic worry for Jewish donors is that in the relatively small pool of Jews in the world, perhaps a child born to an egg donor might meet and decide to marry a half-sibling, someone conceived with an egg from the same mother. Yet with anonymous egg donation, the two would likely never know the connection. For sperm donations, Orthodox Jews and others have preferred non-Jewish donors precisely to avoid the greater possibility of consanguinity. Despite worries about a rising intermarriage rate, Jews are relatively endogamous. In marriage is still more likely among Jews than among many other groups.

Once again, women and men are different

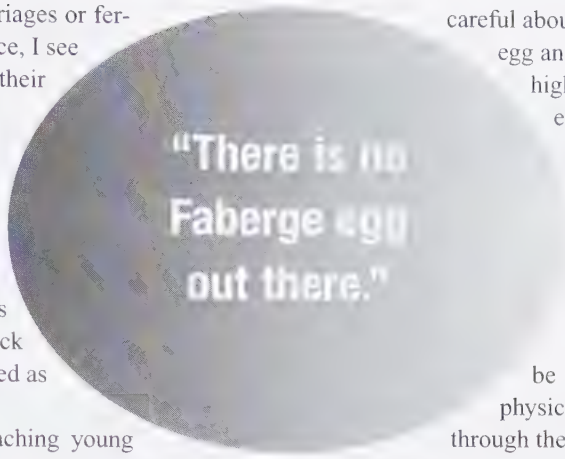
Concern for whether or not you might have a child "out there" created with *your* genetic material seems to be almost exclusively a worry for women. In a wide-ranging conversation about "reproduction and the Jews" with a group of about 40 students at Brandeis University, the women students were for the most part reluctant to consider egg donation because they sensed they would wonder later on about the child the egg helped create. "So what are you going to do—chase the child down and try to become its mother?" asked one incredulous male student. But motherhood was not the goal; a kind of uncertain curiosity was. And the men did not seem to share these feelings, perhaps because the process of donating sperm is much less personal, and far simpler. "It is very hard to compare egg and sperm donation. What the woman goes through to be a donor is more invasive—both the screenings and the procedure," says Jeane Underleider-Springer. Perhaps the complexity of the treatment—and the link between the two women involved (since their cycles have to be synchronized for the process to work) means that the egg donor may feel more connected to the outcome. Or maybe this concern is part of some hard-wired female protective anxiety about offspring.

Patricia Mendell is very conscious of this when she counsels prospective egg donors. "I do a lot of walking down the road with them, asking, 'Twenty-one years from now, if this child wanted to meet you or wanted more information about you, what would you think?' You must tell women what's involved emotionally as well as physically. And the whole meaning [of being an egg donor] may change when they have children of their own".

There's another major gender difference here, Ungerleider-Springer continues. "You can freeze sperm but you cannot freeze eggs. And it is [physically] easy to get sperm. You can do an interview with a donor, freeze the sperm for 6 months and then do an HIV test. But you need live donors for eggs. You can't bank eggs." What this means of course is that a woman does not have the option—available to men for decades—of storing her genetic material (outside her body) for future use. Technology has not leapt forward to stop or turn back that famously ticking fertile woman's biological clock. "The one thing that will change things for women is when they perfect freezing eggs. So it is *very* important for women to know about aging eggs. Our culture and the media let people know that you can be pregnant at 42—but those are the *rare* cases!!"

Ungerleider-Springer says that the media spotlight on older mothers conveys the false impression that it is easily possible for an older woman (older in this case being over 35 or 40) to conceive and carry a pregnancy to term. Patricia Mendell concurs. "You see older women like [playwright] Wendy Wasserstein having babies, and people get the impression that if one is looking this good at 45 or 50 then it is the same inside as outside—and that all of you is in such good shape." Later pregnancy, often hyped in the

media, doesn't reveal how many miscarriages or fertility attempts preceded it. "In my practice, I see lots of pregnancy loss in women in their 40s."



Right and wrong

Perhaps the factor causing the greatest ethical concern is money, or the commercialization, as some see it, of the reproductive process. One reason the ads for Jewish women's eggs are causing shock waves is that the high end amounts offered as compensation are huge. Is this ethical?

"We have to be sure when approaching young women that we are compensating them for their efforts and not enticing them," warns Pamela Madsen, director of the American Infertility Association. "If you show a young woman today $2,500 or $5,000—a nice piece of money for a young person—and then you show her $50,000; well, then it is different. What if later on in life you were infertile, or didn't marry and have a child? Or you may be obsessed by thoughts of a biological child out there. For [egg-donor compensation of] $5,000 a young woman will think this through; for $50,000 she may not take the time to think it through."

Like Jeane Ungerleider-Springer, Pam Madsen thinks that 18, the earliest age for an egg donor, is just too young for thoughtful decision-making on this subject. Using a woman so young as a donor, someone who has not fully processed the ramifications of the decision, "is not good for the infertile couple or for the baby," says Madsen. "A therapist in an IVF program walks a fine line," says Patricia Mendell. "You want the agency to have a donor, but you want the donor to know what she's doing."

And what about the specter of genetic engineering, for some Jews so terrifyingly reminiscent of eugenics programs? The term "designer eggs" comes up when speaking to seasoned professionals in the IVF field. Laws in many states protect the recipients against later claims from the donor, and also protect the donor "against anyone giving back the child if it is disabled," says Susan Katzman, who says she has never had such a case. Most parents do bond to their child even if the traits they thought the child would express aren't there. Patricia Mendell often tells prospective parents "You may get the donor's mother or the donor's sister or the great aunt. You roll the dice and you hope those characteristics [you want] will come up."

Nevertheless, when IVF costs so much, and when additional significant sums have been spent to compensate the egg donor, the parents or the intended single mother may feel that they can order up what they want as evidenced by the ads. "With the designer baby-making, you are paying for it. It's not like the adoption model, where Caucasian babies are hard to get and you take what you can get. Here you feel you have a choice," says Ungerleider-Springer. "It's a buyer's market. If you are paying that kind of money you can be very clear about your specifications. [But] what happens if the kid, whom you've spent so much money to have—$14,000 for the IVF cycle and $20,000 to the donor, and to whom you're playing Mozart throughout the pregnancy, turns out average and tone deaf?"

Madsen warns again: "There is not the Faberge egg out there. This is about making an imperfectly perfect baby. We have to be careful about holding out the fantasy of the Faberge egg and the model donor. Once you put a very high price tag on this you have unrealistic expectations—and then when the donor becomes a more seasoned adult, she may feel she has been used. Women who may be able to donate eggs to other women are giving an incredible gift, but we have to make sure we are not enticing them."

No one suggests that egg donors not be compensated for their effort, time, physical pain and actual risk involved in going through the process. But, says Madsen, "It can't be the kind of money that makes people not think. These are life decisions that will affect the egg donors their whole life-because when you give up genetic material you always have to consider where it is going.

"Some women can give up their eggs and feel completely disconnected, not baby-izing or humanizing them, just viewing them as genetic material; they see it just like giving blood. But women have to consider: will they be haunted by a decision made in their youth? Can they live with possibility of regret? These emotions can be overshadowed by the large amount of cash in hand. I am concerned about what happens when that 21-year-old becomes 40.

"It is OK for a couple to want Asian or Irish Catholic or Jewish egg donors. The woman who is infertile is trying to have a child as much like herself as possible. I don't consider this problematic. But I consider these price tags completely and utterly irresponsible."

A fertility alert

Jane Sillman, a Boston physician in her 50s who had her own children as she was completing her medical training, says she now speaks frankly to her female interns and residents as they approach their 30s, telling them that "If you want children, you really should consider getting pregnant before you get too much older." It seems that the statistics about the drop in fertility after age 35 are not in the forefront of the thinking even of female physicians. And psychotherapist Patricia Mendell says, "I tell donors that if they want to have their own kids they should start now. Becoming egg donors is not a bad idea—at least young women will come in and begin to talk about reproductive issues."

The large sums of money offered for Jewish women's eggs may raise consciousness about the underlying question (as the recent Newsweek headline on fertility and young women put it): "Should You Have Your Baby NOW?" It may be that the ads serve an unintended purpose—bringing to the fore the prospect of infertility. Jewish college women aren't reacting to the ads in their student newspapers by rushing out to become egg donors. But perhaps the underlying desperation of infertile older women—whose bios match what these young women would themselves aspire to—carries onto the campus a potent message about the very real limits of reproductive technology for women today. ■

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the ***things*** *we* ***do***

BY RACHEL HALL

Tapestry, Bat Zvi
Yeshiva University Museum, New York

In celebration of our 25th anniversary LILITH sponsored its first Jewish feminist fiction contest. We called for "vibrant, compelling, original stories with heart, soul and chutzpah." This short story is the first prize winner. LILITH's editors are grateful for the support provided by Joyce Elsa Goodman, which made possible the publication of this outstanding piece of original fiction.

There is so much food here for the living. With each taste of strudel you and I mourn the dead's missed chance, and celebrate our luck at living, the flavors of cinnamon and apples mixing on our tongues. We grieve by chewing; it is always this way at shiva.

All week I have thought about how to answer your question, though it turns the figs I pluck from the plate to mush, the wine to vinegar: "Great-aunt Isabel," you said "why did you never marry Grandpapa?" The laws of shiva tell us there is to be no idle conversation, no easy greetings as in normal life, but this question, though not idle, is a transgression, too. Not because we sit shiva, but because of our family. Here the secrets are as layered as the buttery, honey-soaked baklava your father eats. Watching you tuck your dark hair behind your ear, I understand that you ask because you are sleeping with your paratrooper friend. I am no longer ashamed to talk of such things. My body is old and I'm used to its mysteries and yearnings, its quiet accounting of kindnesses and losses. If we could speak now, I would tell you this story because you are like me—the same long legs with thick ankles, the same distrust of those who would dote on you. Look at our hands. See how they can open to hold so much.

Eight days ago we buried your grandpapa, Lev, your father's father, my sister Maria's husband. All this you know, already. And that Maria fell sick and how I came to stay with her, to nurse her to look after the children, your father just an infant, and to cook and clean for Lev, this you know too.

He was the only man I ever loved. Did he love me? Isn't that the question you mean to ask? But I ask you, don't love and need become the same beast? I've seen love murdered in an instant, killed by Nazi boots, by the Mufti's knife, by our tanks, rusting now on the highway. I never expected to live this long, to bury so many, and still I don't pretend to know what love is.

"What a lovely baby you have," they'd say. I stopped explaining he wasn't mine.

Sometimes I dream of all the people I've nursed. They sit together in one big bed, propped up on fluffy pillows. The fringe on the lamp shade moves in the breeze and the room is full of a pale green light. I see Mama with a book resting open on her chest, Papa wearing his fez at a jaunty angle. Maria is there, her jet hair falling softly around her face. She wears the garnet necklace Lev gave her on their wedding day—perhaps it will be yours someday.

During the Great War, Papa sent the other children off to school in Egypt, but I stayed home to care for Mama. I knew exactly what she wanted without her having to ask—a damp washcloth, some weak tea, the blinds pulled shut against the afternoon sun. I practiced reading from the Bible to Mama or sat with her in the dark. I kept myself entertained by thinking of the stories my sisters told me in their letters, or by remembering my classmates. I thought often of a girl who sat next to me at school the year before. One day during geography, I saw her burrowing her hand between her legs. It was hot in that classroom, especially since we still wore long woolen dresses and covered our legs, but this girl wasn't adjusting her leggings or itching from the scratchy wool. "What are you doing?" I hissed. She pulled up her skirt, while the teacher showed us the borders the Brits promised to set up in the Balfour Declaration, and showed me her hand rubbing deep inside her. "You should try it," she said, "It's wonderful!" I asked for a different seat after that and then I didn't go back at all, but I would think again and again about the hot classroom, the smell of indigo ink, and her hand darting in and out of her bloomers like the sleek rats in our wood pile.

Without Mama, Papa was aimless. Within a year, he was sick, too. When I nursed him, he mistook me for Therese, his favorite, called me turtle-dove and praised my intelligence. I tried on those compliments, pretended they were mine. Therese was in Paris at Faculté de Droite—this was before the next war, when Jews were still admitted. I tried to imagine living her days filled with books and lectures, meals in cafes with young men in spectacles, but somehow it had been decided that I would nurse.

Before he died, my father gave his blessings to my marriage to Eli. I was 17 and lonely for my mother who might have told me what to expect from marriage, how it fell on the woman to make two people happy. Eli had escaped Latvia only to sit on our balcony over Dizengoff Street. I tried to draw out of him stories about Latvia, his journey to Palestine, but he answered in short sentences, gazing out into the busy street, his pipe smoke spiraling above him like Arabic script. I tell you, even now when I think of Eli, I see his hairless, dry chest as he lowered himself over me, once a week as regular as the Sabbath. I thought maybe there would be babies to fill in the quiet of life with Eli, but they never came.

I tried with food, too—rich stews and pastries, artfully sliced vegetables, but Eli ate each dish quietly as he had the last. Still I shopped carefully, imagining the feast, my husband's face breaking into a smile of delight. Instead, it was the grocer who noticed me. He started leaving me notes tucked into the egg cartons or at the bottom of a sack of plums, so his words, though not his meaning, were lost in the thick purple blotches of juice. Hans would lock the door and we would make love in the back of his store. The slate floor was cool beneath us, but we sweat—a sweet garlicky smell that mixed with the odor of ripening fruit, and the saffron sold to the Spanish Jews, the vats of Greek olives in their oily brine, salty feta, and fancy imported biscuits.

I don't know how long we went on like this, but then the war in Europe was over. Therese was back with her Catholic husband and talk of the Resistance. They had bombed collaborators' homes and counterfeited papers for thousands of Jews. When I told her about Hans, she said "Bien sur, you were lonely, but couldn't you find some progressive friends?" There were cities to be built, rubble to be cleared. A committee was modernizing Hebrew and soon it would be implemented as the national language. Therese refused to speak Ladino with me, the language Mama taught us and from which we were named. She spoke the French she had learned in Egypt and perfected in Paris. She knew so much, it was true, but I had been taught other things.

It was necessary to leave Hans and easy to leave Eli when Maria became ill. After your father was born, the doctor found a

tumor, a growth like a tiny eggplant just under her skull. I moved in to care for Lev, for your aunt —just three years old—and for the baby. Everyone agreed it was best. Maria was still feeding the baby from her breasts, and I would bring Isaac to her in the middle of the night or at dawn, whenever his cries awoke me. As I carried him to Maria, he would root at my breasts, his mouth open, fierce and passionate in his hunger.

For Maria, I brewed chamomile tea with raw sugar, wiped spittle from the corners of her mouth, powdered her pale face and rouged her cheeks before Lev returned home. This was all she asked for directly: "Don't let him see me ugly." Because of my ministrations he never knew of her yeasty smell or the bed bruises—everything was covered with soaps and perfumes, lotions and powders. More lies, for the record.

Later that fall, we buried her next to Mama and Papa. Our living room was so often arranged for shiva that the rug beneath our low stools stayed indented, pocked by our grieving.

How differently we all grieve! Therese wept, refused to eat. Our youngest brother Roberto wouldn't speak of Maria, as if her dying had shamed us. Lev and I were united in our unspoken belief that salvation lay in hard work. He mostly lived at the factory where he developed a triple-milled soap and a line of scented shampoos. He recruited clients in London and Paris. When we spoke, it was of these successes. In the early morning, I'd hear him returning for a change of clothes and a cup of chicory.

I washed and scrubbed that house, repapered the walls. The linens were as white and starched as angel wings. I polished the floors, the heavy dark furniture, the wedding silver so that it gleamed. When I caught a glimpse of myself in these shiny surfaces, I was surprised by my eyes—bloodshot, surrounded by dark circles, but brimming with something. When Isaac awoke, we'd go to the beach. Women in kerchiefs clucked over him, my nephew. "What a lovely baby you have," they'd say. "Such hair!" "What a smile!" I stopped explaining that he wasn't mine. Even later, it was with strangers and their quick assumptions that I most felt my shaky, questionable tenancy.

One night months later, Lev came home while I was cooking a stew. The heat had me flushed and my hair curled over my forehead. He grabbed me around the waist and spun me around. Did I see disappointment in his eyes when he realized I wasn't Maria? Or did he want me—slim and limber already from giving? Funny what the brain holds and what gets lost: I know it was stew I was making, but can't remember what we said then or later eating it together, Isaac cooing from his bassinet near the table. Was this the beginning or was it earlier? Do I remember a big picnic by a stream before he'd married Maria, his hand on my shoulder while he laughed with Roberto, or do I only wish it were so? Notice how there are more questions before there can be answers.

For the holidays we went to Jerusalem and stayed at the King David. The children had one room, Lev another, each connected to mine by a door. We ate at the restaurant on the hotel roof and looked down at the turbans of the Indian Jews, the broad black hats of the Polish and Russian Hasids, the soldiers' caps. There was so much changing then. The waiter brought us dozens of Arab salads on small white platters. Lev laughed with the children. He'd point to a salad and say "Please pass number thirteen," or "I believe I'd like a bit more number thirty-two, if you please." He stuck a whole hot pepper in his shirt pocket, hid it in your aunt's hat.

Leaving the restaurant, a street photographer took our picture, as was the fashion then. He asked for our room number at the hotel and Lev paid him. The next day the photograph was at the front desk. In it the four of us are smiling, Lev's hand is blurred, but looks like it is moving again towards my waist.

It was that night that he first came to me. The children slept in their room with the windows opened, the curtains swaying in the night breeze. I never heard the door open, but I felt the bed dip and Lev slide in next to me. The perfumes from the factory never lifted from his hair or skin; I smelled him before I saw him—a man sweet like frangipani, gardenia, lilies, those flowers with petals like pale thighs. "Isabel," he said kissing my shoulder, "Isabel." My body told me what to do then.

Did he think of Maria as he lifted his body over mine? Did I? We didn't talk afterwards. As it is with shiva, presence was a comfort more than words. Early in the morning the sun woke me. I looked out the window at the pink hills of Jerusalem, blurry like a dream, and felt Lev's legs still intertwined with mine. My mouth was dry. I lay awake wondering what this meant, until Lev stirred and took me in his arms. Again, our bodies seemed to know things we could not. When he left through the connecting door, I could smell his flowers on my skin.

Back at home, we behaved the way we always had in public, in front of family and friends. My place in Lev's home was sanctioned by my role as nurse, the sister-in-law, more spinster than divorcee, in most people's minds. I might have acted this role too well with the children, might have been too strict with them. But because I had taken her husband, I couldn't take Maria's children, too, though I ached to gather them in my arms, sing them songs about cakes and trees and sleep.

All these years I have kept the back bedroom, though the children moved out long ago and I might have moved into Lev's room then or even into a closer room, one with bigger windows, more closet space. At night, I never knew if he would come for me, but I'd wait for him, imagining his body pressed to mine until I could hear his silk pajamas brushing together outside my door. When we traveled, we took adjoining rooms. In cold damp places

My place in Lev's home was sanctioned by my role as nurse, more spinster than divorcee.

like Budapest, Berlin, Dijon, I'd wait in the dark for Lev and always I thought of the people Therese had helped save, people waiting in dark cellars, in hidden closets and attics for food or direction or hope.

Once Therese and her husband visited from America where they'd been living in California. They brought pictures of their big house and garden which was lush and green. There were honeysuckle bushes beneath her kitchen windows, Therese said, but she had longed for the smell of orange blossoms, the smell of our childhood. Once she was here, she complained of the heat, the rude drivers, the warm Coca-cola at restaurants.

"Why don't you just marry him?" Therese asked.

We were sitting in one of those restaurants, drinking iced coffee when she asked me. I stirred my coffee with the long silver spoon. I had never mentioned anything about Lev to Therese. This wasn't just dishonesty; I didn't have the words to tell her what I felt, to explain.

"We couldn't do that to Maria," I said, setting the spoon on my napkin.

"Maria's been dead for fifteen years," Therese said. "Be practical."

I looked at my sister, the intelligent one. I had missed her, even this smug certainty. I might have told her not to talk of practicality in this country, built on sand and rocks, old hatreds and myth. I laughed instead. "Oh Therese," I said, "You've forgotten what it's like to live here. You've forgotten the magic of a desert blossom in the middle of the Negev."

"What is that supposed to mean?" she asked.

"We've had different lives," I said. "We want different things." But I could see she didn't understand, and that the confusion would be transformed into something more concrete—pity and contempt. What I told her was all true and not true, too. It wasn't about Maria anymore. I was tired of doing what was expected of me, so when Lev asked me if I wanted to marry, I said "No, let's keep what we have."

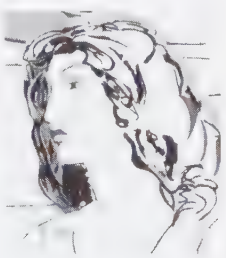
The family talk doesn't disturb me. People will say you are wrong if you aren't happy in their way. In all our years together, I never went to Lev, even when I most wanted him. Sometimes I'd be certain that he'd come and I'd stay awake until dawn, and then he wouldn't come. My eyes the next day would feel dry and sandy, but I never asked when I might expect him. The night before he died, his hand rested on my shoulder as we saw off our guests and I felt certain he would come to me that night. I felt then, after thirty years, an urgency to touch every part of him. Was it so terrible to want that, to be expectant, waiting and hopeful? This is what I chose, if we are ever really given choices.

He never came that night. In the morning he was dead, as you know. The doctor said he suffered a cardiac arrest and died immediately. Here again, Therese would say I'm impractical. Had I married Lev, or given up our separate bedrooms, he might have died in my arms. But he might as easily have died in the garden or in the shower or driving his car to the factory. I know about death—and we do it alone no matter where.

In answer to your question, I can only give you my story. This is all true: I was the eldest and my mother said to me "the fish goes rotten from its head down; you are the head." I minded the younger children, nursed the sick and dying, was married off unwisely. I was lonely. I was not the beauty or the intelligent one I was only Isabel. I didn't expect to know love and when it came to me, I tended it like the dying—gently, quietly, with a tenderness that has no name.

I didn't expect to know love, and when it came to me, I tended it like the dying—gently.

It is time now to end shiva. We rise together, legs creaking from being bent so low to the ground. We are allowed again our leather shoes and there is some commotion by the hall, as we sort through the pile and slip swollen feet into good shoes. Behind me, your father breathes loudly through his mouth as he always has, even as a small child. "Isabel," he says and hugs me. His dark hair is threaded with silver now.



When the door is pulled open, I am surprised by the light and the heat of midday. Together we walk down the steps to the sidewalk and begin our walk around the block, our return to the loud, bright world which looks unchanged by our loss. Above us people argue in their shuttered balconies, children jump rope on the sidewalk. I smell onion cooking and something else, lemon perhaps.

By the curb of the bus station, I see a Bedouin woman, her veil held in place by her chipped teeth. She is surrounded by bulky shopping bags and in her hand she carries a large yellow broom still wrapped in plastic and cardboard, bright against her heavy black dress. I imagine her riding the bus to the desert's driest spot, descending into dust swirls. She will walk into the dunes, past the other villagers who will giggle at that yellow thing, call her frivolous, impractical. In her tent, she will sweep and sweep until cool, brown earth appears. She will insist that the men leave their sandals outdoors, that the children wipe their feet. The broom will have a special place by the door and no one shall use it but her.

"Look," I say, nudging you, though it is Lev who I wish to show.

"Imagine," you say, taking my hand in your smooth, young one.

The things we do. ■

RACHEL HALL's writing has appeared in the Beloit Fiction Journal, The Chicago Tribune and The Gettysburg Review. She lives in Rochester NY and is at work on a novel about a 19th-Century religious utopian community.

WRESTLING WITH THE PAST

Pure Poetry, by Binnie Kirshenbaum, Simon & Schuster, $22.00

Pure Poetry is a romp through the love life of one Lila Moscowitz, part-time college professor, full-time sex fiend and modern formalist poet, who "writes smut and filth in terza rima." An endearing and at times aggravating protagonist, we meet Lila as her thirty-fifth birthday approaches, and as she looks back at a failed marriage and ahead at the prospect of growing older. Reminiscent of Isadora Wing, the lively and ribald Jewish heroine of Erica Jong's *Fear of Flying*, Lila is on a mission to assume command over her own life.

Jews who underwent baptism in the chlorine waters of the country club swimming pool

Pure Poetry is laugh-out-loud hysterical, with wonderful and quirky characters (such as Lila's cross-dressing therapist Leon, "who is a drag queen, but understated—he is a librarian of a drag queen," her mother's stuffed monkey Meryl, who is always at the height of fashion and travels everywhere with her owner, and the ancestral ghosts that live in Lila's Lower East Side flat). Yet it is also a telling story of a woman grappling with her self and with the question of how to love without being consumed.

In her unwillingness to accept the desire for normalcy, for "the ordinary life" which Lila deems to be a trap, we are dragged along on a painful path of denial. We can see the honest workings of Lila's mind, and only wish that she could too.

Hovering along the periphery of *Pure Poetry* are Lila's issues of Jewish identity. The Moscowitz family changed their name to Morse, and were "the sort of Jews who underwent baptism in the blue chlorinated waters of the swimming pool at Fox Hill Country Club." Max, the ex-husband, is a German-American, Nazi progeny, and Kirshenbaum draws heavy-handed parallels between the inevitable perversions of their marriage and those of German-Jewish relations.

As the book draws to a close, though, we are left with the image and the hope that Lila will turn to face the future. After returning from a spontaneous cross-country jaunt which helps her, finally, to come to terms with Max, she creates her own quasi-Passover-birthday table, and sets out the prophet Elijah's glass. "Year in and year out, he's expected, only he never shows, yet they don't give up on him."

—JANICE SIMSOHN

Daughters of Absence: Transforming a Legacy of Loss, edited by Mindy Weisel, Capital Books, $26.95

This collection by daughters of survivors presents their range of experiences grappling with multiple layers of absence: missing information on the Holocaust while growing up, relatives whose stories were silently buried with them, and family relics that disappeared after the War. In "Starting Over," Rosie Weisel first hears about the Holocaust in the sixth grade. In "Kicking and Weeping," Deb Filler visits Birkenau with her father to discover his old bunk replaced by a stove, and in "Family Mythology," Sylvia Goldberg learns that her father was formerly married and had two daughters, now gone.

The opening chapter, Helen Epstein's "Normal" sets forth the premise that all the stories deviate from a sense of normalcy to which survivors attempted to return after their dubious liberation. The collection begins with four "return" narratives whose authors, in their adult life, take a pivotal voyage to what Hadassah Lieberman calls the "planet of death": the sites of concentration camps, cemeteries and former towns of their parents. A daughter of survivors, Lieberman attends the controversial 50th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, a ceremony which did not note that it was Jews who were overwhelmingly murdered in Poland.

From the theme of retrieval and recovery the selections move to stress continuity of life and the difficulties of immigration and adjustment, primarily in the United States and Israel. These women are compelled to integrate their parents' and their own sense of loss into their creative endeavors. Perhaps the most striking narrative on the restorative powers of art is Mindy Weisel's act of painting as an outlet for the painful emotions she hid from her mother to avoid upsetting her, but which then allowed her to honor and celebrate her mother's life on canvas. Filmmaker Aviva Kempner, producer and co-writer of "Partisans of Vilna," a documentary on Jewish resistance, addresses the need to portray events of the Holocaust accurately in film.

The selections reaffirm some research on second-generation survivors, namely that they have lived with varying measures of guilt, and some have stifled their feelings in deference to their parents' immeasurable pain, wanting to please and comfort them and to compensate them for their loss. These authors also highlight first generation survivors' reluctance to speak about their dreaded past and the pains they took to replace haunting memories with a more tolerable present. Mindy Weisel's mother was fond of "china, fine linens, needlepoint, and fresh flowers" and adorned her home in America with things that brought new beauty to her life; similarly, Aviva Kempner's mother's favorite films were old romances that mother and daughter watched together.

Some of the selections are more compelling than others. Nava Semel's short story, "A Hat of Glass," stands out as a touchingly nuanced portrayal of a labor camp woman who manages to save the life of one of the inmates.

The range of media employed in these commemorative works—travel narratives, poems, photographs and fiction—presents the multiform ways women cope with trauma, guilt and loss, and at times they read like therapy. For the reader, going through this process reinforces the importance of uncovering and coming to terms with a period of Jewish history the world has not fully acknowledged.

—DANA HERCBERGS

JEWISH WOMEN SEARCH FOR SOUL

All the Women Followed Her: A Collection of Writings on Miriam the Prophet & the Women of Exodus, edited by Rebecca Schwartz, Rikudei Miriam Press (1676 Montalto Drive Mountain View, CA 94040), $17.00

WHEN WOMEN OF OUR GENERATION share Passover memories with our grandchildren and great grandchildren, among those memories will be dancing at women's *s'darim*, tambourines in hand, to the music of Debbie Friedman. Women of a certain age, who still remember haggadot which direct the youngest male child to recite the Four Questions, have witnessed a sea change—or perhaps, a Song of the Sea change.

A newly published collection of writings on Miriam the Prophet and the women of the Exodus takes its name and theme from the same verse in the Torah (Exodus 15:20) as Debbie Friedman's song: "And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances." The slim volume, hailed as a team effort by editor Rebecca Schwartz, offers a stimulating variety of interpretations.

Despite her popularity among feminists, Miriam's story occupies only a few verses in the Torah. Yet because each of these citations seems to call out *"darsheini,"* interpret me, the role of Miriam lends itself to exploration and embellishment of the elliptical Torah text. The volume presents the work of well-known poets like Alicia Ostriker, Davi Walders, Marjorie Agosin, and Merle Feld, and published feminist scholars like Naomi Graetz and Chava Weissler, along with those of less well-known women writers. In their talented hands this text becomes pretext, a Rohrschach for the concerns of Jewish women. They grapple with a range of difficult issues, including the lesser role of women in Jewish leadership, the marginalization of the old, the repeated calumny that women talk too much, and the place of the unmarried woman in a culture that values the nuclear family.

In this book, classical interpretations of midrash share space with fanciful legends and *divrei* Torah, Torah interpretations. Poems and stories reflect aspects of the life of Miriam: as the young guardian of her brother Moses, as musician and prophetess, as rejected leader, as embittered victim, as a menopausal woman, as crone.

Imagine, suggests Carol Anshein in her poem "Miriam's Blues," what it would feel like to be Miriam in her prime: "I am Miriam/ (in menopause)/ filled with memories/ some magnificent/ some mournful..."

This book would make a fine text for a women's study group, or perhaps for a study of varieties of midrash. It certainly furnished me with ideas for an upcoming *d'var Torah*, sending me scurrying to consult more traditional commentaries for comparison. These writers beckon us not just to dance with Miriam, but to study her and to try to understand her—and ourselves.

—RABBI AVIS DIMOND MILLER

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Contemporary Jewish Writing in South Africa
An Anthology
Edited by Claudia Bathsheba Braude
Bringing together the best and most noteworthy of a wide range of contemporary writers who represent the historical specificities and contradictions of South African Jewish life under apartheid, *Jewish Writing in South Africa* makes compellingly clear the depths and complexities of a society in which racial identities, including Jewish whiteness, were deliberately constructed.
$60 cloth *Jewish Writing In the Contemporary World series*

The Nation without Art
Examining Modern Discourses on Jewish Art
By Margaret Olin
Looking through the history of art, a reader might conclude that Jews could not create art and such an assumption, historically incorrect, would be no accident. As we see with disturbing clarity in this book, the discipline of art history—even the first scholarly studies of Jewish works of art—encourages the idea of the nonartistic Jew. Ranging over the last two centuries, *The Nation without Art* illuminates the rise of the paradigm of the nonartistic Jew and expresses the ways in which theorists, critics, and artists have sought to subvert, overcome, or work within it.
$50 cloth

Call Me Magdalena
By Alicia Steimberg
Translated by Andrea G. Labinger
Erotic entanglements, startling revelations, a furtive intruder, even a possible murder? Not at all what the students of Mind Control class envisioned when they gathered on a ranch outside Buenos Aires for a relaxing weekend. But here nothing is quite what it seems it should be, least of all Magdalena herself, who while recounting the weekend's events, changes her name as often as she changes her mind. In what is probably the celebrated author's most interesting and complex novel, Magdalena conducts us through her tortuous childhood as an Argentine Jew and through her doubts about morality and mortality, the existence of God, and the amorphous nature of identity.
$16.95 paper / $45 cloth

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Of Unknown Origin: A Memoir, by Debra Levi Holtz
Council Oak Books, $23.95

DEBRA LEVI HOLTZ'S STRONG SENSE OF PLOT SETS this memoir by an adoptee apart from scores of others. The book opens on the eve of the author's Jewish wedding, with the arrival of an unsigned postcard from someone claiming to have met Helen, her birth mother, and stating only that she is "VERY nice." This card, however, does not immediately launch the author on her search to find her birth mother. Instead she waits several years and does not begin to look until, like many adoptees, she herself becomes a mother.

Through court papers, a Motor Vehicle Bureau check, and tips from a support group, Holtz eventually identifies her birth mother, but this discovery only raises more questions, because Helen neither acknowledges nor completely denies the biological connection, flatly refuses to share information about the man who fathered Holtz and makes veiled threats of violence to keep Holtz from pursuing a relationship with either of them.

The author recounts in flashbacks her adoptive father's murder by underworld business connections, followed quickly by her mother's mysterious second marriage (during which Little Debbie is sent to live with cold grandparents) before her mother resurfaces with her soon-to-be-third husband. Much later the author finds out that her adoptive mother may have used connections to have some adoption records "destroyed" in the belief that their existence would enable the birth mother to reclaim Holtz.

Although Holtz's adoptive family is Jewish, neither her birth mother nor the man she suspects of being her birth father were Jews. Her birth mother consented at the time of the adoption to her child being raised by Jews. When the author discovers what she had long suspected—that she was not born Jewish—she is not shaken, and downplays the genetic component of being Jewish. Holtz writes, "But for my fears about [my husband] Steve's response, it didn't really matter to me whether or not I was Jewish. Religion is not genetic; there is no DNA molecule that flows through our blood dictating what our faith will be. We follow our own beliefs."

Holtz does not address the religious legal issues of identity here. (She did not convert to Judaism nor was she born to a Jewish mother, leaving her, technically, non-Jewish). Instead, she makes an interesting connection between the mixed blessings of being a Chosen People and being a "chosen baby" (the euphemism for an adoptee): ". . . I had much in common with the Jewish people. Like Israel, surrounded on all sides by people different and distrustful, I had felt isolated and constantly under attack. My birthday fell on the same day that Israel declared its independence. And just as the Israelites were chosen to receive God's revelation, I too had been chosen to fulfill someone else's vision of whom I should become."

—MICHELE KRIEGMAN

Through the Unknown, Remembered Gate: A Spiritual Journey by Emily Benedek, Schocken Books, $24
A View from my Rooftop: Reflections of an Inner Life, by Renee Garfinkel, BIC Publishers, Washington, DC, $12.95

HERE ARE TWO REAL-LIFE ACCOUNTS by contemporary, professional Jewish women who find it necessary to withdraw from familiar channels to envision their lives differently, to renew connections with "the deep heart's core"—to use Yeats's phrase—and with their own religious traditions.

The story of Benedek, a writer in her thirties, is especially rich and intriguing. In many ways, it is a classic conversion narrative. A secular Jew whose parents assimilated and deprived her of self-defining cultural markers, like story telling, Benedek finds herself exiled in Dallas. In the process of losing her gentile lover and "good" job as a television reporter-producer, she experiences a sudden attack of blindness. Eventually diagnosed with Lyme disease (and subsequently cured), her blindness becomes a metaphor for all that Benedek isn't "seeing" in her life.

Benedek embarks on a journey to supply the missing stories, to write herself into her interrupted family narrative. She begins by attending services at a shabby but friendly synagogue, and proceeds through a course of committed investigation and study that finally leads her to join a Conservative synagogue, while at the same time exploring more Orthodox practices. An expert storyteller, Benedek gives us a happy, if modern, ending: she finds a perfect husband (not through a matchmaker but via the Internet). They marry in an Orthodox service. The book ends with Benedek's ecstatic visit to a *mikvah* whose waters—perhaps—help her conceive her first child.

Two of Benedek's guides on this journey are gentiles: Ella Bedonie, a Navajo woman (the subject of Benedek's two earlier books, *The Wind Won't Know Me* and *Beyond the Four Corners of the World*) and Dr. Andresen, a remarkable psychiatrist. The paradox is that without their examples, wisdom and support, she almost certainly would not have returned to Judaism. The other guides are mostly male rabbis whose text interpretation stresses tradition as a good in itself—a need with which Benedek agrees.

As a feminist, I find it troubling that Benedek accepts these strictures so readily, that she never encounters a feminist rabbi, or discovers the increasingly common use of midrash as a way to interpret texts imaginatively. Of course, this is not her intention. She wishes the past she enters to remain intact; the restrictions, for her, are part of the story.

Garfinkel is a fifty-year old psychologist who writes a journal recording her reflections on her first "sabbatical" in a thirty-year working life. As in the best journals, there are thoughtful insights here, and occasional gems. Garfinkel is especially perceptive when writing her observations about children: "America can neither educate its children nor keep them alive," or comparing Judaism to other religions: "Buddhism deals with how people suffer, Judaism wonders why." Unlike Benedek, Garfinkel ends as she began: a busy, happy, fulfilled woman who likes her life and only wishes for more time to think about it. For her, Judaism is the core of a belief system that also includes Thomas Merton and Buddhist insights.

Each of these books underscores the importance of connection to one's religious tradition. Read together, they'll stimulate the reader to reexamine her own life as well as her religious expressions and choices.

—ENID DAME

THE GREAT BABY DEBATE

Reproducing Jews: A Cultural Account of Assisted Conception in Israel by Susan Kahn, Duke University Press, $17.95

ISRAEL HAS MORE FERTILITY CLINICS per capita than any other country in the industrialized world. Its pioneering medical and clinical research have earned it an international reputation as a center for the diagnosis and treatment of childlessness, attracting patients from Europe, the Middle East, and even the United States. But even more intriguing is the fact that artificial insemination, ovum donation, in-vitro fertilization and similar procedures are subsidized by the country's national health insurance. Israel is also the first country in the world to legalize surrogate motherhood, providing contracting parties follow the guidelines set out in The Embryo-Carrying Agreements Law, passed in 1996.

Israel is also the first country in the world to legalize surrogate motherhood. . .

The extraordinary pro-natalism expressed in these policies is underscored by the glaring absence of official interest in family limitation. In striking contrast to the state's willingness to assist conception, family planning programs are funded almost completely by private, charitable sources. Neither contraception nor abortion, which is legal, is routinely part of the basic medical insurance coverage extended to all Israeli citizens.

Reproducing Jews is an ethnographic study of the social, legal, and personal ramifications of the technologies of assisted conception currently available in Israel. Susan Kahn accounts for this

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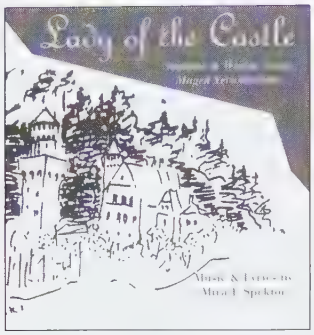

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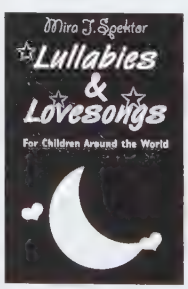

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striking situation by demonstrating how a secular social welfare state and the religious courts converge around the issue of reproduction.

Though the book has much to say about the results of this complex juxtaposition, perhaps the most intriguing is that single motherhood through artificial insemination is widely accepted and socially supported. Such births occur regularly in Israel and even some modern Orthodox women have pursued this option. The overwhelming desire to create Jewish babies, a mainstay of Jewish religious and cultural life since Biblical times, is supported in modern-day Israel by Rabbinical law, which, in determining Jewish kinship as contingent solely on being born of a Jewish mother, has never required marriage (or even marriage to a Jewish man) as a prerequisite to legitimating children as full-fledged members of the Jewish people. In addition, traditional Jewish family and child-centeredness persists in powerful ways, reinforced by the demographic pressures of Palestinian and Arab birthrates, and memories of the six million lost in the Holocaust.

Kahn's book nicely explores the complexities and contradictions that arise when reproductive technology is put to such social uses, and her analysis of the more guarded but generally positive response of the Orthodox to this technology is particularly insightful. She combines ethnography with explications of contemporary uses of legal and Rabbinic texts, drawing out interesting insights about the pressure the new technology places on Jewish and Western notions of family, kinship and current thinking about the reproductive potential of women's bodies.

—REGINA MORANTZ-SANCHEZ

OUR REVIEWERS

ENID DAME is a poet and midrashist. • REBECCA GUTTERMAN has written and performed her theater pieces nationally. She is currently a third-year rabbinical student at Hebrew Union College in New York. • MICHELE KRIEGMAN is an adoptee who is reunited with her birth mother and birth father. She is the president of the marketing consulting and communications firm, InterMarket Directions. • AVIS DIMOND MILLER is Rabbi at Adas Israel Congregation, Washington, DC • REGINA MORANTZ-SANCHEZ is professor of history at the University of Michigan. Her most recent book is *Conduct Unbecoming a Woman: Medicine on Trial in Turn of the Century Brooklyn* (1999). • JANICE SIMSOHN of Madison, Wisconsin, works in the Jewish community, leads wilderness trips, and writes.

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LILITH'S 5th Annual Selection of Books For Young Readers

Edited By Naomi Danis

If one imagines children's books falling along the moral persuasion spectrum between smug and subversive, a subversive book nurtures hope for a better, different future, and, by example, encourages young readers not to succumb to the often cynical despair of the grown ups around them. This past year has been a dream-shattering one for many people who had felt hopeful about a peaceful resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. And the yearning only grows greater as each side struggles to have its own dreams and reality accommodated and accepted by the other. This year we call your attention to several hope-restoring books about Israel and other subjects.

Dangerous Friendships

Running on Eggs

by Anna Levine, Front Street/ Cricket Books, $15.95

Samir and Yonatan

by Daniella Carmi, translated by Yael Lotan,
Arthur Levine Books/Scholastic Press, $15.95

Running on Eggs and *Samir and Yonatan* both tell of young people overcoming fears separating Israelis and Palestinians. Each book's teen protagonist grows a friendship with someone from "the other side," though one of the main characters in each has lost a family member to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Despite this, they reconcile their desire for friendship with the need to be loyal to their own communities. These books poignantly and candidly portray the tensions, distrust, and nervousness any bridge-building evokes.

In *Running on Eggs*, the narrator, a Jewish girl named Karen, lives on a kibbutz just south of the Lebanon border. Yasmine, a Palestinian-Israeli girl, lives in an Arab village near the kibbutz. The two girls meet on the bus that takes them to their separate schools, and during practice sessions for a community track team. Yasmine, the superior runner, has to quit the team because her father demands that she dress more traditionally—she replaces her running shorts with long skirts. The girls begin clandestine meetings in the unclaimed land between the kibbutz and the village, where Yasmine helps Karen prepare for a big race. They know their family and friends would disapprove of their training together, and the girls' friendship is complicated further because Karen wants to win the race in memory of her father, killed in the 1982 Lebanon war. She's afraid that Yasmine will not understand this. Once the connection between the girls is exposed, their friendship and trust for one another is tested. The two communities are brought together by Karen and Yasmine's association, and both sets of friends and families embrace and support their friendship.

Samir and Yonatan is a more nuanced portrayal of the life of young Palestinians and Israelis. Samir, a Palestinian boy, fell off his bike, shattering his knee, and must spend several weeks in a Jewish hospital within Israel—a fate he considers worse than that of his younger brother Fadi, who was shot and killed by Israeli soldiers. The book intertwines two complex threads: the budding friendship between Samir and Yonatan, another patient in the children's ward, and Samir's own memories of and feelings about growing up surrounded by war. Yonatan is a quiet and introspective Jewish boy who only speaks to Samir after the lights go out. He introduces Samir to the wonders of the universe outside the window and the possibility of escaping into the world of the stars. Samir is alone in this world of Jews. His family is unable to visit him because the government has closed off the West Bank. He spends much of his time reflecting on how his younger brother's death changed each person in his family, and each relationship. Author Carmi excellently represents the unhappy reality of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, and the confusion of a young boy who is both thankful and regretful to be removed from that world for a short period of time.

These two books and their main characters move beyond the typical stereotypes of Israelis and Palestinians, showing how young people are often able to conquer fear and hatred in ways that their elders are not.

—ENID SCHATZ

Lilith Asks About Palestinian-Israeli Picture Books

LILITH's managing editor Naomi Danis, herself a children's author (*Walk With Me*, Scholastic), spoke recently with Irrit Dweck, a New Yorker of Syrian Jewish background. Irrit completed a gender analysis of four contemporary Palestinian-Israeli children's books as part of her master's degree in Middle East and Asian Languages and Cultures from Columbia University. In light of currents events and the solidarity expressed by Palestinian-Israelis towards Palestinians, we wanted to know more about the attitudes and values of picture books being read to young Palestinian-Israeli children.

LILITH: What spurred your interest in this literature?

Irrit Dweck: I was raised in a Zionist, Modern Orthodox community. Singing "*Kahol velavan ze tseva sheli*" (blue and white, my colors) in kindergarten was taken for granted, like celebrating shabbat, or brushing your teeth. I learned to love and respect an Israel that was home for the Jews and only the Jews. The Arabs were the enemy. But these Arabs spoke the same language that my father spoke to express his love. These Arabs ate the same food I learned to cook from my father and mother. If my family eats this food, and speaks this language, is my family of Syrian Jews bad? Or good?

I decided to study Arabic in college in order to understand. I wanted to understand, finally, all the comments made by my relatives, those curses and enthusiastic conversations surrounded by laughter. In my Arabic classes I relearned a history of Israel. Learning a language is not just about memorizing words and grammar. It's about learning a culture. Studying Arabic forced me to explore why my professor referred to what I had learned to call Israel as "Palestine/Israel." This led me to research the rise of nationalism and its relationship to Zionism. I realized that the Zionism and pro-Israel talk I learned in elementary and high school was only one perspective. The songs I sang in kindergarten no longer rang true. It was not only *eretz sheli* (my land) but was a land believed by Palestinians to have been taken from them. I wondered what Palestinian children read at school or what Palestinian Israeli children sang in *their* kindergarten classes.

The Arabs were the enemy... But they spoke the same language my father spoke to express his love, and ate the same food I learned to cook from my father and mother.

I focused on the literature written by and for Palestinian Israelis, perceived as the "other" and at times "the enemy" by the majority Jewish population in Israel. I expected their children's stories to contain a strong Palestinian nationalist voice. In addition, I expected a clear distinction between male and female gender roles, but I was not sure what these roles would be.

L: What people—or books—crystallized your thinking, or turned your ideas upside down along your way?

I.D.: After intensive Arabic language study at Middlebury College—where I took the required oath to speak only Arabic for the nine-week course— I studied Arabic for a year in Cairo.

After my year in Cairo, I felt comfortable enough to interview Palestinian Israeli educators and writers in Arabic. I went to Israel to collect children's stories and met three powerful women working to change their community and the education children receive: Samira Nairuch, Wafa Zidan and Nabila Espanioli.

Samira is a writer, teacher and doctoral candidate. She is the author of *Anwar*, a simple yet sophisticated story about a little girl going to school for the first time. In this story females change and improve their surroundings; Samira emphasizes the importance of equal education and opportunity for girls and boys.

Samira explained that the Center for Arabic Children's Literature in Haifa, funded by the Israeli government, publishes original Hebrew books translated into Arabic, adapted tales from 1001 Nights, and a series of original stories written by Palestinian Israelis. These are provided free to Palestinian-Israeli schools throughout the country.

Nabila Espanoli is director of the Markaz al-Tufula in Nazareth, a non-profit organization established in 1984 by a group of Palestinian-Israeli women to professionalize early childhood education. Beyond translating remarkable children's literature from around the world, Nabila is interested in creating children's stories specific to a Palestinian-Israeli audience and she holds writing and illustration workshops. For example, one book, *Ma Ahla Aklati (How Wonderful My Food Is)* centers around foods cooked by Palestinians living in Israel. The illustrations include both boys and girls to attract both.

Wafa Zidan directs Dar al-Tifl Al-Arabi in Acco, established in 1976 to raise the education level of Palestinian-Israeli children, to stress early childhood education and to pressure the government for equal rights and budgets for Palestinian Israelis. This center functions as a school, and a place to write children's books and create new classroom activities. For example, *Shagarat al-zeytoun*, (The Olive Tree), written by Mariam Mar'i, is about an olive tree, a signifcant cultural symbol, and the production of olive oil from a tree the grandfather planted. Here again, boys and girls model gender equality and cooperation.

What I learned is that children's literature is not only an educational tool, an art form and a way to communicate values to children, but also offers "parenting advice."

L: Do you think these books will be able to keep ahead of the adult disappointment and cynicism in the peace process?

I.D.: I only hope that books will give the children strength and courage. Nabila Espanoli published *i'bad al-Shams, Hahamanit, (The Sunflower)*, a story from Zimbabwe by Gill Bond that was translated into Arabic and Hebrew. One page features Hebrew above and Arabic below and the following page has the opposite, conveying a sense of equality and respect for both languages and peoples. Perhaps reading the same stories in their own language brings respect to each and greater common ground. ■

New Historical Fiction

A 14-year-old in Venice, a 15-year-old in Prague and a 16-year-old in the Confederate South each tell what it's like to be Jewish, female and bursting with life.

Rivka's Way

by Teri Kanefield, Front Street/Cricket Books, $15.95

Rivka Lieberman, a 15-year-old Jewish girl living in the Prague Ghetto in the 19th Century, is different from her friends, who are all content to marry and live their lives within the confines of the Ghetto walls. "Am I the only girl in the world cursed with this restlessness?" she wonders. When she finally gets a chance to accompany her father into Prague, it only intensifies her longing. "The soaring feeling inside her that made her want to fling her arms wide was a secret she had to guard carefully," writes Kanefield. Soon Rivka dares to impersonate a Gentile boy on short, bold forays into the city. During one such adventure, alone in Prague, she compares herself to Moses ("a stranger in a strange land"): "Had Moses felt this frightened yet deeply alive?" she asks herself. When Rivka befriends a man who is unjustly thrown into debtor's jail with no recourse, she is faced with a hard decision, to risk leaving the Ghetto again or to abandon this man to a grim fate. Her choice creates an uproar and deeply changes Rivka's view of her world.

Shylock's Daughter

by Mirjam Pressler, translated from the German by Brian Murdoch, Phyllis Fogelman/Penguin Putnam, $17.99

In *Shylock's Daughter*, a 16-year-old living in the Ghetto Nuevo of Venice in the 16th century chafes at her narrow life, restricted from without by the government of Venice, and from within by the endless rules of pious Jews. The story —told by two characters lifted from Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*— Jessica herself (Shylock's daughter) and Delilah (the maid)— unfolds as a tale of a high-spirited girl longing for the kind of life led by her secret Christian lover, Lorenzo, in beautiful Venice and beyond. Like Kanefield's Rivka, Jessica laments, "I want beauty, splendor, a bit of happiness. . . I don't want to spend my entire life being humble and modest."

Eventually, Jessica is forced to make a difficult choice: Life in the Ghetto with her bad-tempered and emotionally distant father (and with the Jews who look down on her sinful vanity), or life as a baptized Christian, married to the nobleman Lorenzo. Either decision will have a negative impact on both Jessica and her family, and a girlfriend warns her of the peril of making such decisions herself: "How many girls know for sure that they have the right one [husband] if they are allowed to decide for themselves?" But the author (this is the feminist part of the book) creates a Jessica who believes otherwise, and who, in the end, trusts no one but herself to know what is right for her.

The War Within

by Carol Matas, Simon & Schuster, $16

This book, a third piece of historical fiction about a Jewish teenage girl, takes the form of the diary entries of Hannah Green, a 14-year-old living in the South during the Civil War. Raised with a scant sense of Jewishness but with strong Confederate sympathies, Hannah is shocked when the war begins and her family is forced out of their home by their own Confederate soldiers and then driven out of town by Federal soldiers who accuse all Jews of profiteering. Throughout the Greens' journey to Cairo, Illinois, where they will obtain papers that allow them to travel freely as Jews, Hannah feels compelled to re-assess her relationship with different parts of her identity.

Unlike *Rivka's Way* or *Shylock's Daughter*, however, the plot of *The War Within* does not revolve around a girl's yearning for adventure and the painful choices she is forced to make. Instead, Matas writes about how the Civil War makes one Jewish girl "grow up" as she confronts the impact of blind hate and racism, and as she matures beyond her "pre-War" self who confidently labeled people and held strict beliefs about Northerners, Southerners, Jews, Christians, Whites and Blacks. Matas convincingly portrays Hannah's transformation into a young woman who comes to believe in tolerance, to empathize with slaves' points of view, and no longer thinks that Federals are always wrong, Confederates always right, and "labels" always meaningful.

—ANNA SCHNUR-FISHMAN

Daughters Know Best

Love and Other Four-Letter Words

by Carolyn Mackler, DelacortePress, $14.95

If you asked her, sixteen-year-old Sammie Davis (no relation to the Rat Pack) would say that her life in Ithaca, New York was pretty good, at least for someone who was "absolutely, completely average." But when her parents announce a trial separation and Sammie's dad takes his sabbatical alone in California while Sammie and her mom prepare to spend the year in New York City, she begins to suspect that her life may not be so average after all. And she is not happy about it.

Mackler tells a story most adolescents are familiar with: the

quest to figure out how and who one wants to be. As she learns to navigate her new city, Sammie has to contend with the anxious difficulties of leaving her old friends and making new ones and her anger at her parents, but also with worrying about her mom, who grows more depressed every day. In addition, there's also Eli Rosenthal, son of her mom's best friend, and the gorgeous Johnny Depp look-alike from her building to think about. It's enough to make a girl give up on the human race entirely, and that's all before school has even started.

Sammie is an utterly likable individual, realistic in her anger and angst but spunky in her choice to explore the "Big (Rotten) Apple" rather than sit on her futon and mope. Her intelligence and warmth shine through her insecurities, and it is no surprise that Sammie soon builds a small community around her. It is refreshing and fabulous to find a teenage girl who likes guys, but not more than she likes herself (Johnny Depp gets canned when he forgets her name for the third time), and who is willing, even in her anger and pain, to admit that life is way more gray than black or white. In the end, Sammie realizes that she can confront her parents without losing them, that she's not so average after all. She's learning how to steer her life down the roads of her own choosing—even if she hasn't gotten her learner's permit yet.

What My Mother Doesn't Know

by Sonya Sones, Simon & Schuster, $17

When we first meet Sophie, she is "so totally in love" with Dylan, her boyfriend, that she seems a bit flat as a character. But as her story unfolds as a series of short poems we come to learn that she has two best friends, troubling parents, and an artistically keen sense of observation. *What My Mother Doesn't Know* reads like a diary, as Sophie gives us an intimate peek into her life at school and with Dylan, her history of friendship with Rachel and Grace, and her thoughts about her world.

Full of humor and the often ironic realities of being a ninth-grader, Sones's poems are frivolous and serious, funny and sad, thoughtful and exuberant and confused. Sophie's friends make good-natured fun of her affinity for the class dork on one page, then on the next, in "Culture Clash": "Dylan says / when I meet his mother today / I shouldn't mention / that I'm Jewish. / I say / okay, but can I / tell her about / the HIV positive thing? / He gives me a look. / I give him one back." Sophie grapples with her first breakup, sexual harassment, and falling in love, recording it all in her unique and honest voice. She is quirky, smart, and sensitive, and, in the end, proves to herself and the world that she can make the right decisions when it's important, even if they're hard.

—ARIELLE DERBY

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Poignant Words: Boys Talk

Understanding Buddy
by Marc Kornblatt, McElderry, $16

6-321
by Michael Fraser, Atheneum, $15

Secret Letters From 0 to 10
by Susie Morgenstern, translated from the French by Gill Rosner, Puffin Books, $4.95

A Book of Coupons
by Susie Morgenstern, illustrated by Serge Bloch, translated from the French by Gill Rosner, Viking, $12.99

Sam Keeperman is a fifth grader whose family's cleaning woman is killed when she drives into a tree to avoid a deer. That fall, her son Buddy is the new kid in class, and *Understanding Buddy* is the story of Sam's attempt to befriend him. No one at school has said anything about the death, and Sam assumes the event is too painful and private to be mentioned. But keeping this secret takes its toll. Sam's best friend Alex can't understand Sam's protective kindness to Buddy, who acts indifferent and hardly speaks. Sam keeps deciding not to share his thoughts and questions with his old friend, his new friend, his teacher, his principal, his family. Never in trouble until now, he starts to fight—even coming to blows with Buddy—because of misunderstandings that grow out of his silence. Keeping silent gains Sam a kind of grown-up manliness, but the real growth in this realistic book about heartbreak comes when the boys actually speak out.

Illustration by Serge Bloch from *The Book of Coupons* by Susie Morgenstern

Intermittently Sam sits in Hebrew school classes where the kids discuss: Was the flood a big mistake God made? Was it right for God to test Abraham? Why couldn't the twins Jacob and Esau be friends? Author Marc Kornblatt is an afternoon Hebrew school teacher in Madison, Wisconsin. Luckily, we who can't be in his class can read this book.

Like Sam, Marc Chaiken—narrator of *6-321*, named for a sixth grade class in a Queens, New York, public school—also grows into silence. Marc is beaten up on the playground because of a misunderstanding—and is then punished for it. Not complaining about this, not telling his friend Lily how much he likes her, and retreating to his room when his parents are squabbling instead of confiding in them, are among his poignant heroics.

In an endnote to his autobiographical debut children's novel—which closes with President Kennedy's assassination—Michael Laser tells of researching the news, curricula, TV shows, songs and slang of 1963. In the interest of full disclosure he writes that the *real* sweet girl he had a crush on in sixth grade was actually Jewish, like most of his classmates, not Asian, as she is in the book.

Unlike Sam and Marc, whose struggles to grow up seem to be about containing themselves and then slowly learning when to speak out, Susie Morgenstern's *Secret Letters from 0 to 10* introduces a boy who is strong and silent because nothing ever happens to him. Then ten-year-old Parisian Ernest wakes up to life under the intrepid and unremitting life force of a new girl in his class. Victoria loves him at first sight, and, with an entourage of thirteen brothers (twelve named for the Twelve Tribes of Israel) overruns Ernest's gray, routine life and captures his heart.

Ernest reconnects with his father, never heard from since he abandoned the boy to the care of his grandmother when Ernest's mother died in childbirth. Through serendipity and the pursuit of clues, Victoria and family help in this endeavor, which includes the receipt of a box of ten years of letters to Ernest written, one each day, by his father. The reader cheers for the love, fun, good humor and sweetness in this book as these bravely challenge tragedy and sadness.

A Book of Coupons, also set in Paris, is only the second book in English by Susie Morgenstern—a New Jersey native who has published over 40 children's books in French. In this lighthearted classroom parable a new teacher gives his students coupons entitling them to lose homework, dance in class, sing at the top of their lungs wherever they like, tell a lie, sleep in class. The students—and readers–learn that to be born is to have permission to be fully alive, and that an adult who encourages seemingly transgressive behavior is to be cherished.

—ND

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Girls Make Holidays Their Own

In *Rivka's First Thanksgiving* by Elsa Okon Rael, illustrated by Maryann Kovalski (McElderry Books, $16), Rivka persuades a *beit din* (rabbinical court) that it is okay for Jews to celebrate this American holiday. In *How I Saved Hanukkah* by Amy Goldman Koss (Dial Books for Young Readers, $15.99), Marla Feinstein is the only Jewish kid in her fourth grade class. When her best friend, steeped in Christmas tradition, stays over at her house, Marla takes charge of dreidl-playing, latke-making, and even hora-dancing, drawing in her assimilated and not very enthusiastic family and transforming their traditions. *A Mountain of Blintzes* by Barbara Diamond Goldin illustrated by Anik McGrory, (Harcourt, $16), evokes the "stone soup" folk motif where the children save the day in a Catskill Mountain family struggling to have enough food on Shavuot. In *Daughters of Fire: Heroines of the Bible* illustrated by Uri Shulevitz (Harcourt, $20), Fran Manushkin gives us fresh and original retellings rich with seamlessly woven midrashic threads. Here are more than a dozen human and heroic role models from Eve to Esther. Finally, Susan Goldman Rubin's *Fireflies in the Dark: The Story of Friedl Dicker-Brandeis and the Children of Terezin* (Holiday House, $18.95), a biography/history/art book. It embodies the inspiring legacy that even in the most dire circumstances art—as the opportunity to apprehend beauty and to create it—makes a difference. —ND

Illustration by Maryann Kovalski from *Rivka's First Thanksgiving*

Reviewers:

ARIELLE DERBY recently graduated from Smith College and lives in Brooklyn, where, she says she is pursuing justice, equality and good books for all. ENID SCHATZ has worked for Interns for Peace in Israel and is now a PhD candidate in Philadelphia, researching rural Malawi women. ANNA SCHNUR-FISHMAN is a 9th grader at The Boston Latin School.

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National Council of Jewish Women, the leading Jewish woman's organization devoted to social justice seeks an **Executive Director.** Must be highly skilled and experienced with volunteer orgs. Strong knowledge of social justice issues and Jewish values. Proven mgmt, fund raising and marketing skills. Strong written and verbal communication skills. Serve as public spokesperson. Competitive compensation package. Contact: **DRG** — Fax: (212) 983–1687 or rwasserman@drgnyc.com

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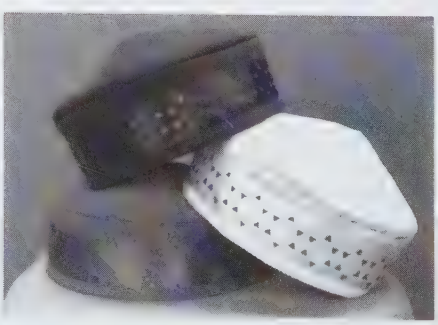

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Beyond Forgiveness *(continued from page 19)*

To give a favorite example—some years ago in Baltimore, the American Cancer Society received hundreds of calls from women who had been led into having a conversation with a man who claimed he was from the Society but whose questions, as the interviews went on, became increasingly sexually harassing. Later interviewed for an article, the women uniformly said that what distressed them the most was not, in fact, the guy's obscenities, but their own response. They couldn't switch gears fast enough. They heard themselves saying, politely, to their horror, "I'm sorry, but I really have to go now. I'm afraid I have to hang up."

And in studies that examine how gendered norms become internalized in children, most men report that they learned what it means to be a male through being told things like "Boys don't cry" and "You go right back out there and beat the shit out of that kid." Women, on the other hand, learned what it means to be female through another set of shibboleths: "Be the bigger person," "Let it go," "Don't be so sensitive," "Let bygones be bygones," "You're more mature than your brother, let him have his way," "He doesn't mean it." All of these speak to the issue of forgiveness. Classically, we are the ones asked to make the concessions, to forgive the unforgivable, to sacrifice ourselves for the greater cause. In ultra-Orthodox Jewish families, girls internalize the message, "Do it for *shalom bayit* [for family harmony]," a phrase that domestic-violence victims in this community invoke to explain why it takes them significantly longer (than non-religious women) to report abuse.

Sociobiologists would argue that there's a reason for the female "forgiveness gene": we females are less physically powerful than males; we know that it is dangerous not to "make constant nice-nice," a phrase that a psychology client of mine—a rape victim–always used to characterize her and her sisters' roles in their family of origin. Her brothers, she explained, got rewarded for their emotional tone-deafness. "If they walked all over you or pissed you off that was somehow more acceptable than if they, God forbid, were caught checking to see if they'd hurt you, if you were okay." For males in this woman's family, if you're "sucking up to somebody"–that is, if you're asking for or granting compassion—you lose face, you acknowledge a certain defeat.

"People who apologize easily feel empowered by saying, 'I'm wrong,'" writes Lerner. Typically, those people are women, who feel better (or perhaps what they feel is 'safer') after saying, "I apologize." But people who apologize with difficulty—many men, that is—associate apologizing with feeling worse, "with weakening the fabric of the self [and] with losing power or control."

In the theological abstract, then, mandating "forgiveness" at this penitential season—that is, having male scholars and liturgists enshrine forgiveness as moral canon for *their* world of male worshippers and their male God—is a corrective, necessary response to the demands of the male ego in conflict with the communitarian goals of society. But asking women to enact compulsory forgiveness is an injury of a whole different color. Where's *our* spiritual corrective?

What we women need from Judaism, then, is a confirmation of our *tshuvah* process, *our* work towards *shlaymut* (spiritual and emotional wholeness). We need to get religious hand-holding like men get it. We need the autumn holidays to encourage our soul-searching and stocktaking in relation to *our* healing process.

Judaism's liturgy and theology need to support women in our work towards responsible *not* forgiving, when that's appropriate, so that we can come to believe that the world, indeed, *won't* explode as a result of our failure to "make constant nice-nice." Maybe we need to *not* forgive because Mom did—over and over—and it ruined her life. Maybe we need to *not* forgive because hating this person who has traumatically victimized us is the way we feel most deeply safe. For many of us, *not* forgiving is more difficult than forgiving, and having Judaism support us in our authentic journey towards emotional resolution would be a deeply religious experience.

Or, if we're "attached" (after all, that's what we do) to the canonical idea of forgiving, maybe we can try something refreshingly new this High Holiday season: forgiving *ourselves*. For many martyring women, this would definitely count as extremely high-level forgiving. Exhorting people to forgive, to put it another way, might be an important civilizing prod for men, but it's harassment for some women, a victimization dished out from our religious *heym* (home), from the very place that we need also to feel embraced and understood and, indeed, forgiven.

Rachel Adler, the feminist scholar, writes about how liturgy and theology themselves can "belie or misrepresent [women's] experience, making us not only invisible, but making our invisibility invisible." Such religious traditions, she argues, not only "violate integrity, [but] insult God." And including women in prayer, she adds, means "including not only their bodies, but their prayers"—something that the biblical Hanna managed to push her way past over two thousand years ago. "However radically Judaism has changed, and however radically its prayer books have changed," writes Adler, "one requirement that never altered was that women temporarily abandon the selves they really are in order to pray in the words of the community."

"Prayer is not for lying to God," as Adler puts it, "and prayer is not for hurting or excluding members of our community." It's time to recognize that this core concept of the most holy season of the Jewish calendar–forgiveness–can lead us to do both. ■

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Lilith Regrets

Our apologies to Yiskah Rosenfeld, author of "Taking Back our Rites: Lighting Candles, Baking Challah, and the Laws of Married Sex" [Summer 2001]. Her name appeared incorrectly in the Table of Contents of that issue.

tsena rena *Where to go for what if you're Jewish and female.*

CONVERSATIONS

Ushpizot: Welcoming Women. According to a mystical tradition, each night of Sukkot a different set of guests is invited to rejoice with us in the sukkah. The custom of inviting seven biblical men has been more widely celebrated, but there are also medieval sources that suggest inviting ushpizot, seven female prophetesses: Sarah, Miriam, Devorah, Hannah, Avigail, Huldah, and Esther. A color poster created by Ellen Alt depicts these biblical women. $10 plus $3.95 shipping from *Ma'yan: The Jewish Women's Project of the JCC, 15 W. 65th St., 8th fl., New York, N.Y. 10023.; (212) 580-0099,x232; paulette@mayan.org*

Did your mother slap your face when you got your first period? For a study of this particular form of marking menarche, a researcher in biological anthropology is looking for respondents to an anonymous questionnaire. *Lana Thompson, P.O.B. 1245, Boca Raton, FL 33429; Vesalius@worldnet .att.net*

The Burning Bush: Jewish Women Write About Sexuality editors Rachel Kramer Bussel and Lawrence Schimel seek personal essays for their anthology. Send two copies of your 1500-5000 word essay with SASE by November 1 to: *Rachel Kramer Bussel, Prince St. Station, P.O. Box 39, New York, NY 10012*; email any queries (but not submissions) to *burningbushbook@yahoo.com;* guidelines on *http://raquelita8.tripod.com/burningbush.html*

Change is the only thing that is permanent. Exile, migration, loss and triumph—from a woman's point of view—are the themes of a collaborative performance piece in progress, Seas of Change, created by musician Vanessa Paloma, and her mother, Gloria Abella De Duncan, a visual artist. "The woman is the social mender," notes Abella De Duncan, who fled Columbia with her family ten years ago. To invite them to perform, contact *Vanessa Paloma (310)788-8698; vpaloma@aol.com*

"Chained Women," a BBC TV program is available on videocassette at no cost—to organizations only—through the British organization *The Agunot Campaign, c/o Sandra Blackman, 17 Templewood Ave., London NW3 7UY, England. fax 44-020-7431-7237; www.agunot-campaign.org.uk*

"Beyond the Nation in Israeli Folkdancing" by Elke Katschl; "Vilified or Glorified? Views of the Jewish Body in 1947" by Judith Brin Ingber; and "Do You Bow? Dancing to the Image of the Sabbath Queen" by Judith S. Neulander appear in Jewish Dance, an issue (Volume 20 #1–2) of the Jewish Folklore and Ethnology Review. $20 from *JFER, 4350 Fairfax Dr., #640, Arlington, VA 22203; members@americanthassn.org.*

Drawing by Judith S. Neulander

EVENTS

Women and Judaism is a symposium co-sponsored by the University of Nebraska and Creighton University on October 28 and 29 in Lincoln and Omaha. *Leonard Greenspoon, Creighton University, 2500 California Plaza, Omaha, NE 68178.(402)280-2304; fax (402)280-1454; ljgrn@creighton.edu*

Yiddish folktales, lullabyes, prayers and poems have long given voice to the passions and dreams of Jewish women. On January 20, Yiddishists Ellen Cassedy, Cecile Kuznitz, Marcia Levensohn, Tina Lunson, and Natalie Wexler will present poetry and fiction by Kadya Molodovsky, Rokhl Korn, Beyle Schaechter-Gottesman, and others. Knowledge of Yiddish not necessary. Sponsored by Yiddish of Greater Washington which sponsors monthly events, classes, scholarships, a biennial conference, and a newsletter. Info from *Yiddish of Greater Washington, 6125 Montrose Rd., Rockville, MD 20852, or yiddishdc@yahoo.com.* Event info from *JCC of Greater Washington, 6125 Montrose Rd., Rockville, MD 20852; (301)230-3714.*

Living the Legacy, an international family-oriented gathering of Holocaust survivors, their children and grandchildren, June 30 to July 2, 2002, will include speakers, video viewings, facilitated discussions, networking, music, theatre, fine arts, and writing workshops. Descendants of the Shoah's primary mission is to examine the impact of the Shoah on the lives of descendants and others, and to find ways descendants can support each other. For more information, and/or to volunteer to help organize contact *Michael Zolno, Descendants of the Shoah, Chicago 2002 Living the Legacy, PO Box 6405, Evanston IL 60204; chidos2002@aol.com; http://chicago2002.descendants.org.*

The emancipation of the Dutch Jewish woman will be one topic of a symposium on Dutch Jewry and Modernity, 1880–1940, November 18–20 in the 'Trippenhuis' in Amsterdam, organized by the Committee for the History and Culture of the Jews in the Netherlands, under the aegis of the Royal Dutch Academy of Arts and Sciences. *Hetty Berg/ Joods Historisch Museum/ Jewish Historical Museum, Postbus 16737, 1001 RE Amsterdam, The Netherlands; 31 (020) 6269945; info@jhm.nl*

tsena rena

HEALTH

Get Your Prescription Contraceptive Covered. This practical guide tells employees how to take action to see that employer health plans comply with recent federal rulings declaring that it is illegal sex discrimination to exclude this coverage from an otherwise comprehensive health benefits plan. Free from *National Women's Law Center, 11 Dupont Circle NW, #800, Washington, DC 20036; (866)PILL4US; www.nwlc.org/pill4us*

Early detection is critical in the fight against Cancer. Free confidential reminders to make yearly cancer screening appointments are available from a website launched by the College of American Pathologists: *www.MyHealthTestReminder.com*

"Some days Mom is just too tired or hurts too much to snuggle. I made a 'love phone' to send my hugs and kisses to my mom when I have to be careful of her owies." *The Hope Tree: Kids Talk About Breast Cancer* written by Laura Numeroff and Wendy S. Harpham, illustrated by David McPhail, (Simon & Schuster $12) benefits the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation.

Making Homes Livable for the elderly, preventing falls, brightening dark and depressing spaces, and making environments more habitable are the agenda of Project GEM (Gerontologic Environmental Modification), at New York's Weill Cornell Medical Center. Led by Rosemary Bakker, author of *Elderdesign: Designing and Furnishing a Home for Your Later Years* (1997), who was an interior designer until her mother's hip fracture awakened her to a pressing need. GEM also identifies legal and practical problems and makes referrals to agencies, such as the Metropolitan New York Coordinating Council on Jewish Poverty, which will install grab bars for free in your bathroom, do minor repairs, install deadbolt locks, and put up window gates, where possible. Find out what elders need in their environment from *http://cornellaging.com/gem*

A Vegetarian Starter Kit contains information, recipes and bibliography free from *People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, 501 Front St., Norfolk, VA 23510; (888)vegfood; www.peta-online.org; www.GoVeg.com*

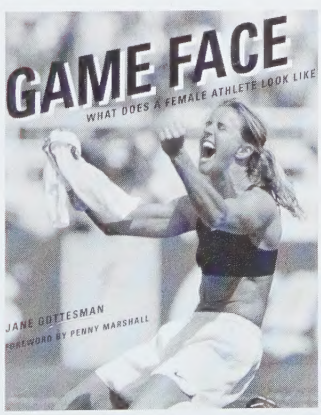
EXHIBITS

Encountering the Second Commandment: You shall not make for yourself a sculpted image or any likeness of what is in the heavens above or in the waters under the earth," (Exodus 20-3-4). A juried exhibit explores how this prohibition may have hampered—but has not precluded—the creation of Jewish art. September 4–December 10 at the JCC of Greater Pittsburgh and travel later to JCC museums in Boca Raton, FL and Newton, MA. A catalog is available as well as a curriculum and interactive website for middle

Dona Gracia Mendes drawn by her descendant, Barbara Mendes

school students exploring Jewish history through Jewish arts and artifacts. *American Jewish Museum of the JCC of Greater Pittsburgh, Squirrel Hill, 5738 Forbes Ave, Box 8190, Pittsburgh, PA 15217; (412)521-8010; fax (412)521-7044; www.jccpgh.org*

What Does a Female Athlete Look Like? "Game Face," a collection of photographs and personal stories, documents the impact that sports have on the daily lives of girls and women. Curated by Jane Gottesman, the exhibit shows at the Smithsonian Institution Arts and Industries Building in Washington DC through January 2, 2002 and then on to a five year national tour. A book by the same name has been published by Random House. Gottesman notes the exhibit includes Jewish athletes as well the work of a handful of Jewish women photographers who told her that having their photographs included makes up for the opportunities they missed because Title IX (1972), guaranteeing equal access to athletic programs for females, hadn't been enacted—or wasn't enforced—when they were in school.

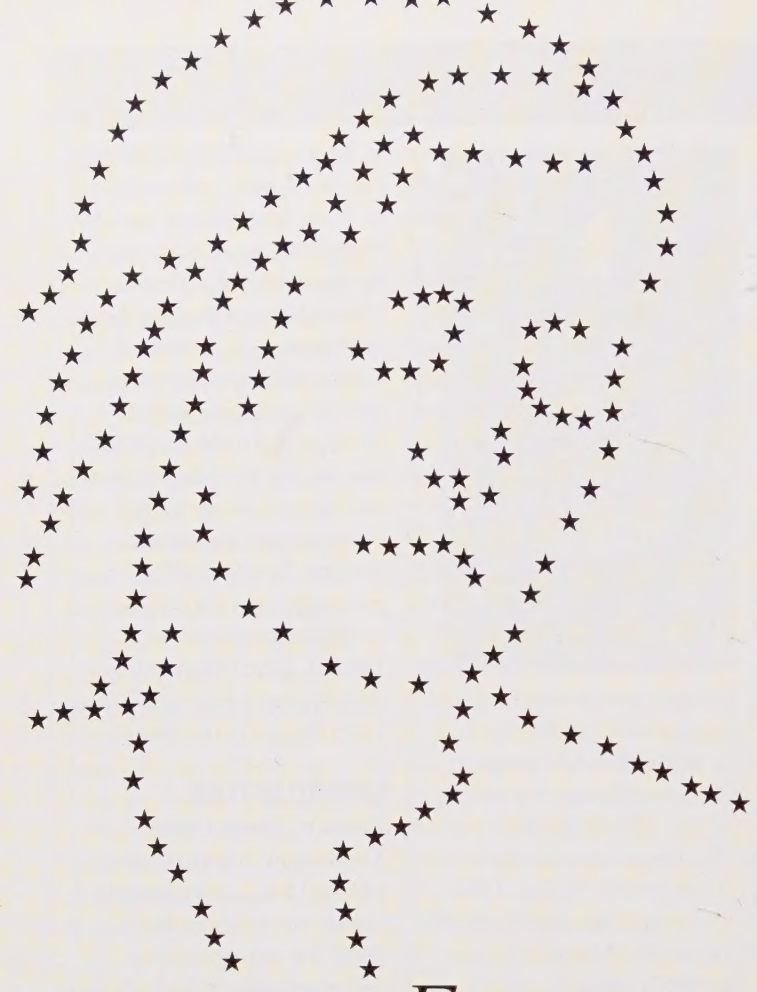


OPPORTUNITIES

Learn to Teach Jewish Meditation. A certification program that combines individual and group coursework, retreats, practicums and internships is available worldwide via a distance learning program. A new class starts in January 2002. *Chochmat Halev, 2215 Prince St., Berkeley, CA 94705; (510)704-9687; teachers@chochmat.org*

Scholars, scientists, artists and writers: fellowships may support your independent work, part of Radcliffe's continuing commitment to the study of women, gender and society. Applications due October 15, 2001 for fellowships from September 2002 to June 2003. *Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Application Office, 34 Concord Ave, Cambridge MA 02138; (617)496–1324; fax (617)495-8136; fellowships@radcliffe.edu*

—compiled by NAOMI DANIS



MY MOTHER'S *Face*

My mother takes out her false teeth
and her face collapses.
She is someone else's Bubbe now,
with huge, sad eyes,
gumming words as if they are chicken bones.

I have seen my mother without her teeth
as if teeth are the tent poles that hold the shape of the world.
Under the tarp of pleated flesh
is the whole dark sky, simmering nebulae.

My mother takes out her false teeth
and I fall through the wrinkled flap of her skin.
Someday I will be one of the old Jewish women
who sat in lawn chairs on the edge of the sidewalk in Brooklyn
watching me build anthills in the cracked cement.

I have seen my mother without her face.
Everything I thought I was will fall away.

My mother will be young and beautiful again.
She takes out her stars. Her mouth is filled with light.
Beneath the dome of her skull
is the axis of this fragile world.

—CASSANDRA SAGAN

HOW TO FIND THE *Big Dipper* AND THE *North Star*

First, wait for the darkest night,
and look up. Let go of the need
to find pattern and meaning in anything,
and just when you start to pride yourself
on your ability to love black chaos,
the image of a dipper will appear.
This will be the ladle that your mother used
to dole out steaming bowls of Sabbath
soup, celery floating like a life raft
in a lustrous yellow ocean.
That ladle, worn and bent
and dulled by the sacrifice
of so much more than chickens,
is up there in the heavens,
like your mother, still
offering the sustenance you need.
Think of the last drop suspended
on the lip of that spoon, then falling
in slow motion the way Sabbath
slows the motion of the week.
Fix that last drop
as a memory of your mother's
long trek from Russia
with nothing but hope
and a recipe for chicken soup.
That drop is the North Star,
the same star that pulsed
above her little *shtetl* bed
like the heart of a vital dream.
In her honor, make a wish.

—SANDY SUPOWIT

CASSANDRA SAGAN has worked as a Poet in the Schools since 1984 and writes and performs original music for adults and children. She says she specializes in "ukulele midrash."

SANDY SUPOWIT is a Michigan educator, whose collection of poems, "Halves of Necessity," was published in 1999 by Plain View Press.